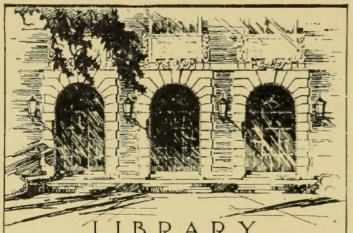

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THE

MYSTERIES

OF THE

COURT OF LONDON.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS,

AUTHOR OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SERIES OF "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," "FAUST," "WAGNER, THE WEHR-WOLF," "THE DAYS OF HOGARTH," "THE CORAL ISLAND," "THE BRONZE STATUE," "THE SEAMSTRESS," "POPE JOAN," "KENNETH," "THE NECROMANCER," "THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE," "THE PIXY," "ROBERT MACAIRE," "MARY PRICE," "THE SOLDIER'S WIFE," &c., &c., &c.

WITH FIFTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS.

DRAWN BY W. H. THWAITS.

VOL. V.

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ERRATUM.

Page 20.—Twenty-third line from the bottom, second column, for *delicate skin*, read *delicate olive*.

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THE MYSTERIES

OF

THE COURT OF LONDON.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD MAN'S SECOND MARRIAGE.

On the bank of the Trent, and within the border of Lincolnshire, stands Saxondale Castle. The edifice is of immense extent, formed of buildings surrounding two quadrangular courts, and which having been erected at different periods, exhibit various styles of architecture. When viewed from a distance, the long irregular ranges of battlements and towers, frowning with a sort of gloomy grandeur above the river and over the landscape through which it winds its way, give the idea of a strongly fortified place, and though on a nearer approach this impression is scarcely diminished, yet a minute survey will show that while displaying the baronial architecture of bygone times, the edifice never was intended as a fortalice of defence.

The scenery amidst which it is situated, is imposing and beautiful,—giving to the entire mass of building and all its accompaniments an air truly picturesque. The long line of castellated structure forming the western side of the castle, stands upon the very verge of the river's bank; and in some parts the masonry itself is washed by its limpid waters. The front of the edifice, which is at right angles with the stream, commands a southern view of sweeping valleys undulating like a rolling ocean of the brightest green, the uniformity of which is however broken by groves of a darker verdure, as if they were islands dotting the vast expanse. White cottages and village-steeples, peeping from amongst the dense foliage of those woods, enhance the picturesque beauty of the scene; and all those broad lands, far as the eye can reach, constitute the lordly domain of Saxondale.

On the eastern side of the castle—the one farthest removed from the river—two magnificent rows of ancient trees, evidently the growth of centuries, form an avenue beneath the luxuriant foliage of which it is sweet to find shelter from the scorching summer's sun, or to ramble in the refreshing coolness and mystic serenity of evening. This avenue borders the spacious gardens, in the centre of which there is a lake surrounded by ornamental buildings, and having an immense greenhouse at the farther extremity,—all in a gothic style, and harmonizing with the architecture of that side of the castle itself. Beyond the gardens, which are laid out with taste and elegance, lie the shrubberies and plantations; and thence the rolling landscape extends, as above described, until bounded by the horizon.

The interior of the castle requires a two-fold description. One portion of it,—namely, the whole of the front, and all that side overlooking the gardens,—is used for the habitation of the inmates; and is fitted up with the sumptuous magnificence, refinement, and taste of modern splendour, yet in a manner to harmonize admirably with the antiquated style of the architecture. The doorways, the windows, the chimney-pieces, and the cornices, are all carved or sculptured in the richest manner, and are inwrought with armorial bearings and decorative devices. The entrance-hall is of immense extent, with a double row of marble pillars on each side, and having an elaborately groined ceiling. The pavement of this hall is of variegated marbles. At the extremity facing the high folding-doors at the entrance, a magnificent staircase is seen rising to about the mid-height of the hall; and from that point it branches into two equally handsome flights, one winding to the right and the other to the left hand. One leads to the state-apartments and drawing-rooms: the other to a landing, whence open the library and picture-gallery. The walls all up these staircases are decorated with armorial devices, and ornamented with suits of armour and statues. From a long corridor, stretching the whole length of that line of the building which overlooks the gardens, and which is called the Eastern Side, open the sleeping apartments intended for the family, visitors, and guests. The chambers of the numerous dependants communicate from a similar gallery over-head.

So much for the inhabited portion of Saxondale Castle: but the whole of the Western Side overlooking the river, and that end which may be termed the back of the building, have long been disused. They are the most ancient parts of the castellated structure: but the rooms which they contain are attended to with great care, and are shown as curiosities to all guests visiting the castle. These rooms appear to have been furnished and to have been fitted up in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,—blending the rude contrivances of the two latter Henrys' time with the more refined improvements of the Elizabethan age. The walls of many of these disused apartments are hung with tapestry, for the most part torn and tattered: the furniture consists of similar tapestry-work or Utrecht velvet covering the oaken chairs, some of which are elaborately carved. But to preserve this furniture and tapestry from falling into complete decay, frequent fires are lighted in the rooms, and constant attention is paid to them.

One or two more features in Saxondale Castle must be mentioned ere we enter upon our story. The first is the chapel, which is situated in the western side overlooking the River Trent. Not having been used as a place of worship for some centuries, its Catholic appearance has not been disturbed: the altar-piece, with all its Roman emblems and appurtenances, has therefore been preserved with as much jealous care as the tapestried chambers in the same part of the building. There are several fine old pictures, representing sacred subjects, in this chapel; and in the vestiary are preserved some interesting specimens of Roman Catholic canonical costume. From this vestiary a low door opens upon a dark, narrow, and precipitate staircase, made of stone and winding down the circular shaft of a tower. At the bottom of this staircase there are vaults stretching to a considerable distance beneath the western side, and even under the bed of the river. These subterraneans were doubtless used as places of penance—perhaps even of more terrible punishment—in those Catholic times when a portion of Saxondale Castle was tenanted by the holy fathers of a monkish order.

In a cloister branching out from the chapel, and on the same level with it, are several tombs and monuments, enclosing the remains of some of the earlier scions of the house of Saxondale. In the middle of this cloister stands a colossal figure, carved in black marble, representing a warrior in complete armour with his vizor closed, and reputed to have been the image of the founder of the Saxondale family in the earliest times of the Tudors. The appearance of this giant-statue, in its sable gloom, but in a natural life-like attitude, with the left hand upon the hip, and the right arm extended as if menacingly pointing towards the door, is well calculated to produce a startling effect upon the visitor who, unwarned of its presence there, enters that cloister for the first time, and beholds the colossal image uprearing its huge form in the midst of the dim cathedral-light which pervades the place.

The reader must not fancy that from this long description of Saxondale Castle we are about to entertain him with the gloomy mysticism or the dark horrors of a romance of the olden time: but it was necessary for the purposes of our narrative to record these details in respect to the ancestral seat of a family which is destined to play no mean part upon the stage of our story. Without further preface, therefore, we will proceed to state that in the year 1825 does our narrative open.

At that period Lord Saxondale, the owner of the castle and its immense domain, was a nobleman well stricken in years, but who had recently married a very young wife by whom he had three children. This was his second marriage; and it is necessary that we should inform the reader how and under what circumstances it came to be contracted.

Lord Saxondale had long been a widower and also childless,—the presumptive heir to his title and estates being his nephew the Hon. Mr. Ralph Farefield. Ralph was an only child, and his birth cost his mother her life: his father, who was Lord Saxondale's younger brother, died soon afterwards of a fever; and the infant orphan was left entirely dependent upon his noble uncle. Lord Saxondale accepted the sacred trust generously, and, having then no children of his own, brought up his nephew with as much love and affection as if he were his son. His lordship habitually resided at his palatial mansion in London, paying an annual visit of two or three months to his castle in Lincolnshire; and as he was wont to be excessively indulgent towards his nephew, the latter, when his education was finished and he left college, plunged into all the dissipations and debaucheries of London life. For some time the old nobleman seemed unconscious of the evil courses which his nephew Ralph was pursuing; but at length he received such intimation thereof—either from well-intentioned friends or mischief-making gossips—that he was induced to watch the young man's proceedings. One inquiry led on to another; and Lord Saxondale succeeded in unravelling such a complicated skein of vices, profligacies, and even villanies on the part of his nephew, that he recoiled in horror from the frightful discovery. He learnt that Ralph was an inveterate gamester, a cold-blooded seducer of innocence, and a profligate of the most unscrupulous character; that speculating upon the certainty of inheriting the title and entailed estates of Saxondale, he had borrowed large sums of usurers; and that he had even been heard to drop dark hints "that if his old uncle did not soon take his departure from this world, he would adopt means to send him prematurely out of it." This might have been mere idle talk or wretched bravado on Ralph's part: but certain it is that the discovery of the young man's base ingratitude produced a powerful impression upon the old lord. He did not pause to reflect whether his own exceeding indulgence might not have been mainly instrumental in plunging Ralph Farefield into the vortex of dissipation; but being a man of very strong feelings and of decided character, Lord Saxondale suddenly became as stern and implacable as he had previously been affectionate and foolishly indulgent.

All this investigation into Ralph Farefield's conduct had been conducted unknown to the young man himself; and while he was pursuing his pleasures and his debaucheries, he little suspected the storm that was brewing over his head. At length it burst. One morning—just as daylight was making the street-lamps burn dim and sickly—Ralph was endeavouring to effect his usual stealthy entrance by a back door into Saxondale Mansion in Park Lane, London, when he was suddenly encountered by his uncle's steward, who put a letter into his hand and peremptorily bade him quit the house. Half-intoxicated as Ralph was at the time, this unexpected proceeding sobered him in an instant; and tearing open the letter, he was astounded at its contents. These were laconic enough. They merely gave the young man to understand that everything was known—that thenceforth he was never again to appear in his uncle's presence—and that an income of 300*l.* a-year was all that would be allowed him for the future. Recovering from the stupor into which this letter for the moment threw him, Ralph burst forth into a volley of the bitterest invectives against his uncle,—adding, as he addressed himself to the steward, "Go and tell the old curmudgeon that I don't care a fig for him. His estates are entailed and go along with the title: so it is but a little matter of time, and then I shall have all. In the interval I can raise plenty of money on post-obit bonds in the City; and therefore I repel with scorn the miserable pittance of three hundred a-year which the old boy offers me."

With these words Ralph flung out of the house, and hastened away to rejoin his boon-companions and report to them all that had taken place. They applauded his spirit; and he plunged more deeply into dissipation and debauchery than ever. But in the meantime the old steward, who was a matter-of-fact kind of person, and never a sincere friend towards Ralph Farefield, proceeded to give Lord Saxondale a full and faithful account of all that his nephew had said, not even suppressing a single oath, nor one tittle of the indignities, threats, or defiances which the ungrateful young man had levelled against his uncle.

"Oh!" said Lord Saxondale, his mind at once made up how to act. "Instead of contrition we have such conduct as this, have we? Let the travelling-carriage be prepared, and within an hour I shall start for Lincolnshire."

The old lord, who was just sixty years of age when this rupture with his nephew took place, had suddenly come to the determination of taking unto himself a second wife, in the hope that she might give him an heir to his possessions and title, and thus destroy the prospects of Mr. Ralph Farefield. While rolling along in his commodious travelling-carriage to Saxondale Castle, his lordship, who could be as vindictive on the one hand as he had proved himself indulgent and generous on the other, gloated over the project which he had formed, and which became strengthened in his mind the longer he deliberated upon it. Who his intended wife was to be, he had already settled with himself: for he knew full well that where the offer of his hand was about to be made, it was certain to be accepted.

The young lady whom he thus had in view, was seventeen years of age. She was the only child of a worthy clergyman occupying a living on the Saxondale estate, and for which he was indebted to his lordship's bounty. Harriet Clifton was a girl of exceeding beauty—tall and admirably formed—and with a development of womanly charms which made her seem three or four years older than she really was. She possessed a fine spirit, a powerful intellect, and a strong mind,—all of which were indicated, young though she were, by the cast and expression of her countenance. Indeed, it was only necessary to look into the depths of her dark eyes when they met the gaze steadfastly and fearlessly—to follow the aquiline lines of her handsome profile—

to contemplate the high proud forehead—to mark the haughty curling of the lip, the swan-like archings of the neck, the statuesque carriage of the figure, and the sedate and somewhat measured step, in order to read the firm decision of her character as easily as if it were printed in a book. At the same time there was nothing unfeminine in the appearance nor improperly bold in the manner of Harriet Clifton. Her forwardness was attempered by an unstudied ingenuousness; and the settled decision of her looks was the natural precocity of a very powerful mind, shedding its influence upon her whole being, and giving its own strong impress to her features. Having lost her mother when she was very young, and having a kind indulgent father, Harriet had received none of those delicate tutorings and refined teachings—those timely checks upon temper and those repressions of self-will—which only a mother or a very near and affectionate female relative *can* give. She was well educated—lady-like in manners—and possessing good conversational powers, the development of which had been hindered by no bashful coyness. Thus, altogether, Harriet Clifton was a woman in form, mind, and intellect, at that age of "sweet seventeen" when she was still a mere girl in years.

Lord Saxondale had been acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Clifton for a quarter of a century, and had therefore known Harriet from her birth. He was well aware of all the points in her character—all its strength and all its self-willed firmness; and though he had frequently thought, when regarding her with a kind of paternal feeling, that she was more precocious than he should like a daughter of his own to be, yet now that he wanted a second wife, he felt assured that Harriet was the very being who would best suit him. He knew that she was good and virtuous, but that she was ambitious—that she possessed a heart which was capable of the noble feeling of gratitude where it was not likely that she could entertain the softer sentiment of love;—and he moreover calculated that if his projected marriage with this damsel should crown his most fervid hope and give him an heir, her resolute and haughty spirit would serve, when he himself should be no more, as an efficient defence to shield her offspring against any open hostility or secret snares on the part of Ralph Farefield.

Such was the tenour of Lord Saxondale's musings as he rolled along in his travelling-chariot to Lincolnshire. He arrived at the castle safe and sound that evening; and the very next day he sent to invite Mr. Clifton and Harriet to pass a week with him. They came, little suspecting what was in store: but after dinner on the first day of their arrival, and when Harriet had retired to the drawing-room, Lord Saxondale unfolded his purpose without much circumlocution, and over a bottle of excellent claret. Mr. Clifton at first could scarcely believe his own ears; next he thought his lordship was joking; and then he concluded that he must be mad. But Lord Saxondale speedily convinced him that he was neither jesting nor insane; and long before the bottle of claret was emptied, the matter was duly settled,—it being taken for granted that Miss Harriet would give her consent. Nothing was said to the young lady that evening: but next day her father introduced the subject to her notice. There was no necessity to wait for a verbal reply from her lips: the flash of triumph in her eyes, the glow mantling upon her cheeks, and the swell of her fine bust, proved how joyous was her exultation, and how proudly she could become the position of Lady Saxondale!

At the expiration of a fortnight the marriage took place at Mr. Clifton's own church; and Harriet became the mistress of that magnificent castle which, as a guest, she had so often admired, and with every part of which she was already so familiar. The intelligence of this marriage, when it reached Ralph Farefield for the first time through the newspapers, did not produce the overwhelming effect which his vindictive uncle gloatingly anticipated: for the graceless nephew thought it most unlikely indeed that any issue would result from so unequal an alliance. He therefore continued his career of dissipation, raising money by whatsoever means he could, and flattering himself that he was displaying a proper spirit by doggedly abstaining from making any advances towards a reconciliation with his uncle. But at the expiration of a twelvemonth Ralph began to grow alarmed, when he learnt that Lady Saxondale had presented her husband with a daughter. Still he consoled himself that it was not a son, and that he was still heir presumptive to the title and estates of Saxondale. Nevertheless, to drown the misgivings which would at times intrude upon his soul, he plunged more deeply, if possible, into dissipation than ever; and finding it growing more and more difficult to procure funds for his extravagances, he saw his aristocratic companions proportionately falling off. At the expiration of a couple more years the newspapers informed him that Lady Saxondale had become a mother a second time—but also of a daughter: and though Ralph's uneasiness now increased materially, he continued to solace himself as well as he was able with the fact that he was still heir to the broad lands and lordly title of Saxondale.

But now Ralph Farefield found it no longer possible to raise money with the usurers on any terms; and he was involved in the most serious embarrassments. All his friends deserted him: but not being able to exist without the companionship of the profligate and the dissolute, he was compelled to seek the society of a lower grade of debauchees than those with whom he had been wont to associate. Thus was he rapidly sinking down in the social scale; and being reduced to positive want, he at length penned a letter of contrition to his uncle. But Lord Saxondale, who since his marriage had resided altogether with his young wife in Lincolnshire, had not lost sight of his nephew even from that distance: or, more properly speaking, he received from his solicitors in London, and from other sources, frequent accounts of the young man's proceedings. These accounts had only tended to confirm him in the loathing and hatred which he had conceived for the graceless debauchee; and he accordingly returned Ralph's letter without a comment. Stung to the quick by what he termed this heartless insult, and goaded to desperation by his necessities, Ralph Farefield began seriously to think of some deadly revenge against his uncle. Nevertheless, the pressure of circumstances compelled him to go and draw from Lord Saxondale's bankers all those arrears of income which he had hitherto scornfully left untouched, and as more than three years had re-

elapsed since he was discarded, he had 900*l.* to receive. Forgetting for the moment his thoughts of vengeance, he plunged headlong once more into dissipation: but he was shortly startled from his debaucheries by the astounding intelligence that Lady Saxondale was a third time a mother—and on this occasion had presented her husband with a son. Ralph Farefield was consequently no longer the heir to a lordly title and vast estate: but then, as he observed to his dissolute associates, "it was but a miserable new-born babe that stood between him and the hope of still inheriting the ancestral wealth and honours."

We have now explained to the reader how it was and under what peculiar circumstances the venerable Lord Saxondale contracted a second marriage at the age of sixty. Four years had elapsed since the day when he led Harriet Clifton to the altar; and he was consequently now sixty-four. This was the year 1825, when in the earlier part of the chapter we first introduced his lordship to the reader. Lady Saxondale was at this time a splendid woman; and she filled her exalted position with as much graceful dignity as if she had been from her very birth reared in the atmosphere of aristocracy and fashion. Not once did the old nobleman regret having married her: for not merely was his vindictive feeling against his nephew at length gratified by the birth of an heir, but he had also experienced much real domestic happiness in his recurrence to a wedded state. For, as he had foreseen, his wife regarded him with gratitude as the author of the brilliant position to which she had been raised; and though she could not positively love a man old enough to be her grandfather, nor indeed had a heart susceptible of the tender feeling at all, yet she behaved towards him with kindness, and was ever solicitous for his comfort and well-being. Lady Saxondale was a woman of passions, but not of sentiments: the former were strong in proportion as they occupied the place which the latter ought to have held in her soul;—and those passions being egotistical and selfish, as all passions necessarily are, were equally capable of prompting her to generous and good actions as to a course the very reverse. Circumstances had therefore favoured the former alternative; and as she was ambitious, she felt grateful to the man who had ministered to her ambition. She now felt, too, that she occupied the proud position of the mother of that heir to whom her husband's title and estates would fall; and also cherishing the hope that there was but little chance of these estates passing away from her own offspring, she felt a pride in contemplating the responsibility connected with her position. These feelings not merely made her cherish the husband who had given her this position and had invested her as it were with this proud responsibility, but they also imparted a certain matronly sedateness to her mind and demeanour; so that at one-and-twenty, Lady Saxondale, while still in the bloom of youthful beauty, possessed the experience and bore the air of a woman of several years older. But lest we should be misunderstood in any portion of these remarks, we must observe, that the lapse of those four years since her marriage, so far from having in any way marred her loveliness, had tended only to develop her charms to the height of their splendour, and to convert a precocious girlhood into a grand and magnificent womanhood.

The reader is already aware that three children were the fruit of her marriage with Lord Saxondale. The two eldest were girls, and were respectively christened Juliana and Constance: the last-born, now a couple of months old, was named Edmund. In respect to the infant babe, we must observe that he was marked on the shoulder with a strawberry. This mark was but very small: still in its diminutive proportions it bore an extraordinary resemblance to the above-named fruit; and of course the old nurse, the female servants, and the gossips of the neighbourhood, were positive in declaring that Lady Saxondale must have longed for strawberries ere the birth of her son. Be this as it may—it is not the less certain that the mark was there, upon the child's shoulder; and her ladyship congratulated herself that it was thus upon a part of the body where it could not be considered a disfigurement.

Such was the exact position of affairs with regard to the Saxondale family in the middle of the year 1825, at which date our narrative opened.

CHAPTER II.

THE CRIME.

Ralph Farefield was, as we have already observed, startled from what may be termed the lethargy of a continuous debauch, upon receiving the intelligence that Lady Saxondale had presented her husband with a son and heir. He suddenly became an altered man; and throwing aside his dissipated habits, as he would a garment which he had worn long enough, he began not merely to deliberate with calmness, but also to act with decision. His acquaintance with the low dens of debauchery in London had taught him where, in case of need, he could lay his hands upon the desperate characters suited to his purpose: and these he was not long in finding out. In the first instance he despatched a secret emissary down into Lincolnshire, who was instructed to prowl about Saxondale Castle and take note of any circumstances which might tend to forward the scheme that Ralph Farefield had in view. This was nothing more nor less than to carry off the infant Edmund, and make away with him. The emissary was accordingly instructed to watch when the child was taken out for an airing—where it was so taken—by whom—and whether its nurse ever walked to any distance from the immediate precincts of the castle. The man whom Ralph employed on this service, was astute, cunning, and wary; and promised to fulfil his mission with despatch and fidelity.

Profligate and unprincipled as Ralph Farefield was—bitter as were his vindictive feelings against his uncle, and his hatred for Lady Saxondale—deep too as was the stake which he had to play—he nevertheless recoiled from the idea of committing murder with his own hand. He shrank thus, not merely from that instinctive horror of shedding blood, which, when the idea is first conceived, seizes upon even the most unprincipled and unscrupulous, but he was likewise afraid of involving himself in the trammels of the law. His plan therefore was to consummate the entire iniquity, not with his own hands, but through the medium of agents: and as he purposed to remain in London and show himself

daily and hourly at his usual places of resort, while the tragedy was being enacted in the country, he felt assured that even though suspicion might seem to point to him as the author of the atrocity, yet it would be impossible to bring the crime home to his door. As for what public opinion might surmise or say, he was utterly reckless: it was sufficient for him to destroy the barrier that at present existed between himself and the splendid heritage for which he was prepared to plunge his soul into crime.

But the plans and calculations of this wicked young man did not stop here: for he reasoned that if the son and heir was once removed, the loss would either break old Lord Saxondale's heart; or if he should survive it, then another crime, perpetrated under circumstances as guarded and as precautionary as the first, would at once sweep away every obstacle to the fulfilment of his hopes.

As we have already said, the requisite agents for Ralph Farefield's purposes did not appear to be wanting; and out of the money drawn from the bankers, he had still enough left to bribe them. Besides, the fourth year was just passed; and he had another three hundred pounds to receive. The means for executing his plans were therefore in his possession.

Amongst the desperate characters whom he had sought out from the vile dens in London, was one whom he specially intended to be the principal agent in the tragic enterprise. This was a ruffian whose name was Chiffin, and who was called *the Cannibal*. The origin of this odious nick-name may be explained in a few words. Chiffin was the son of respectable parents, who reared him well, gave him a decent education, and apprenticed him to a trade: but when seventeen or eighteen, he ran away and went to sea. The ship in which he embarked, was engaged in the South American trade; and when crossing the Pacific, it was overtaken by a violent tempest, so that in a very short time it became a complete wreck. The greater portion of the crew were drowned; but some six or seven men succeeded in getting away in a boat. Amongst these survivors was Chiffin. The small stock of provisions they had managed to bring from the wreck, was very soon exhausted; and for several days they were tossed about on the broad ocean enduring all the horrible pangs of hunger and thirst. At length a whisper passed round amongst them; and they agreed to cast lots who should die to furnish food for the rest. The lot fell upon the boatswain; and he resigned himself to his fate. The dreadful work of death was done—the man was murdered. But when the horrible tragedy was accomplished, an immitigable sense of loathing seized upon all the survivors, save *one* individual: and this one was Chiffin! He alone partook of the loathsome meal. Within a few hours afterwards a vessel came in sight, and the shipwrecked wretches were taken on board; but remaining faithful to an oath which they had sworn previous to the casting of the lots, the dreadful tale of murder was not divulged; and as all traces of the crime had been cleared away from the boat ere it reached the ship, it was not suspected. In due course the vessel arrived in England; and Chiffin, finding that his father and his mother had died of grief during his absence, was thrown loose upon the world. He became the associate of the vilest of the vile in the low dens and infamous neighbourhoods of London; and by the desperate ruffianism of his character, his daring exploits, his success in eluding the officers of justice, and his lavish expenditure of his ill-gotten gains, he was looked up to as a sort of chief or ruler amongst his companions. In the course of time the terrible tale relative to the murdered boatswain got abroad, —either being whispered by one of Chiffin's comrades on the occasion, or else vauntingly proclaimed by himself when in his cups: and thus the horrible appendage of *Cannibal* was joined to his name.

Such was the dreadful character whom Ralph Farefield selected as the principal agent in his own murderous design. We must observe that Chiffin the Cannibal was now about four-and-twenty years of age—of middle height and muscular form—with a countenance of so diabolical an expression, that were it possessed by the most honest man in existence, it would be quite enough to hang him, though innocent, at the very first whisper charging him with an offence. There was something of such unredeemed ferocity—something so awfully repulsive—something so bloodthirsty and cruel, in Chiffin's look, that to meet him even in the crowded street and at broad noon-day would startle the most courageous and self-possessed. Indeed, Ralph Farefield himself could never look upon this man without experiencing a cold chill creep over him and penetrate to his very heart's core: but yet he admitted him into his confidence, because he was just the unscrupulous demon fitted for his purpose.

By the time all Ralph's arrangements were made with Chiffin the Cannibal, the emissary returned from Lincolnshire, and gave such a report that there seemed not the slightest doubt of being enabled to carry the nefarious project into successful execution. Chiffin accordingly set off for Lincolnshire, simultaneously with three of his most faithful confederates. They took different routes so as to avoid suspicion, but having previously settled upon the point where they were to meet in the neighbourhood of Saxondale. Chiffin's instructions were positive and fearfully definite. The child was to be carried off from its nurse—put to death by means of a poison procured for the purpose—and then left in some public place or thoroughfare where it was sure to be discovered, so that its death might be a fact not merely established but also of notoriety.

True to the plan which he had chalked out, Ralph Farefield now appeared in such public places in London as to secure the certainty of a host of witnesses being enabled to testify that he did not at this period quit the metropolis even for a single day. He passed the forenoon at billiard-tables—visited Tattersall's and the Parks in the afternoon—dined in the evening in the coffee-rooms of hotels—and spent the greater portion of his nights at gaming-tables. Thus ten days passed, during which interval he endured no small amount of suspense. He had forbidden his villanous agents to communicate with him by letter, for fear of miscarriage or any other accident which might lead to discovery; and thus during these ten days he knew nothing of what passed. At the expiration of that time he received an intimation that Chiffin had returned to London; and he at once proceeded to the low public-house, or boozing-ken, where he was to meet that dreadful man. On arriving at the place of appointment, he found

Chiffin alone in a private room; and as the ruffian's countenance was too diabolical to betray any deeper villany than those crimes which had already stamped it with their Cain-brand, Ralph could glean little or nothing from his looks.

"Well, is the deed done?" he immediately asked; for suspense was torturing him.

"It is—and well done," answered Chiffin, in the hollow sepulchral voice that was natural to him: "too well done to want doing over again."

"Give me the particulars," said Farefield, now experiencing strange sensations of mingled hope and terror, joy and alarm—a terrible state of feeling which made the frame glow with a heat and yet shiver with a chill at the same time, as if the veins ran lightning while an ice-snake coiled itself round the body.

"Oh! the story is short enough," answered Chiffin, who was making his shabby white hat, with a black crape, turn round on the top of his huge bludgeon, as he lolled negligently in a Windsor chair. "I and the other chaps met according to appointment at the village down yonder; and having settled our plans, we dispersed ourselves about in the neighbourhood of the castle, hiding ourselves in such places as were convenient. Three or four days passed before we could do anything, as the baby was only taken out in the carriage along with the old lord and his wife. And by the bye, isn't her ladyship a beauty? But of course you know her?"

"I have not seen her for some years," answered Ralph impatiently. "Never mind such matters as those: tell me what nearest concerns me."

"Well then, when four or five days had passed and nothing was done, I began to grow uncomfortable; for I thought that four queer-looking gentlemen like me and my mates lurking about in the neighbourhood, might seem suspicious: so I made them tramp off to a distance, while I stayed to do the business by myself."

"Ah! that was more politic!" exclaimed Ralph. "But go on."

"Well, as luck would have it," continued the Cannibal, "the very next day, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, the two nursemaids came out to walk near the river. The three children were with 'em. One of them carried the baby: the other one carried the next child; and the third little brat—the eldest, of course—walked by the side of the maid who was carrying her sister. There was I, hid safe enough in the midst of a clump of trees, watching my opportunity to spring just like a wild beast in one of those Indian jungles that I used to read about when I was at school. Well, the nursemaid carrying the baby came on in front; and the other lagged behind. The very thing that I wanted: nothing could be better! So I waited till the maid with the baby had rounded the clump of trees, if you understand, in such a way that she was hid by them from the view of her companion. Then I sprang out with a black mask over my face. My eyes! what a squeal the girl gave!—and as I snatched the child from her, she dropped down just as if she was shot. Whether she was killed stone dead with fright, or only fell into a swoon, I don't know," added Chiffin coolly, "and don't much care. You may depend upon it, I didn't wait to see."

"Go on, go on," said Ralph, with feverish impatience.

"Ah! I did go on then, too!" continued the Cannibal, with a grin. "You should have seen me scud along the bank of the river with the child in my arms—that's all! I don't suppose I looked very paternal though. However, there I was, cutting along at a break-neck rate: but soon reaching a wood, I stopped and rested myself. Then I cut away again; and when I thought that everything like pursuit was impossible, and that I might put the finishing stroke upon the business where I was, I just poured half-a-dozen drops of that stuff down the child's throat—and by jingo! it was all over with it in a moment."

"Ah!" slowly said Ralph Fairfield, letting the deep breath of suspense escape him. "Then you really have done it?"

"Why, didn't I tell you so at the very first?" demanded Chiffin the Cannibal, his hollow tones now filled with a savage growl, as if he thought that he was suspected. "You don't think, do you, that a chap like me would mind making mince-meat of a baby like that when it's necessary?"

"No, no—I did not mean to offend you," Farefield hastened to observe.

"Why, it's enough to hurt one's dignity," still growled Chiffin, "to think for a moment that one wouldn't do such a miserable little bit of business as that."

"But what became of the body? how did you dispose of it? where did you put it?" demanded Ralph, with renewed impatience.

"I waited in the wood till night came," answered the ruffian; "and then I went and put the little stiff'un down at the door of a cottage about five or six miles from the castle. But now for the proofs!" continued the Cannibal, thrusting his hand into the capacious pocket of the great rough shaggy coat which hung loosely upon him; and he produced all the upper garments that were likely to have clothed a babe of a couple of months old.

Ralph seized them with avidity, and eagerly scrutinized each corner for some sign or symbol that should identify them as having belonged to his infant cousin. Nor did he search in vain. The cloak was elaborately embroidered with designs representing a peer's coronet, and also the arms of the Saxondale family: while upon another garment the name of the *Hon. Edmund Farefield* was likewise worked in delicate embroidery.

"Now are you satisfied?" asked the Cannibal, his eyes leering horribly from beneath his dark overhanging brows. "But I can tell you more. When I stripped off that toggery from the tiny brat, I saw the mark of a strawberry on its shoulder as plain as if it was a real one—but very small though—that had been cut in halves, and one half stuck on to its flesh not so big as a sixpence."

"I am satisfied—quite satisfied!" exclaimed Farefield: then, as he pushed the garments across the table to Chiffin, he said, "You must dispose of these as you think fit. But perhaps it will be best to burn them——"

"Leave that to me," answered the fellow, gathering up the things and thrusting them down into his capacious pocket. "Any farther orders, Mr. Farefield—anything more in my little way?"

"Not at present," rejoined Ralph. "But do not

be out of the way in case I *should* require you at any time during the next few weeks."

"You can always hear of me at this place," said the Cannibal. "You remember the sign? It's the *Billy Goat*."

"I shall not forget. And now," added Farefield, "for the remainder of the reward that was agreed upon between us."

Thereupon he counted down a quantity of gold upon the table; and as Chiffin consigned the wages of iniquity to his pocket, his hideous countenance again expressed its satisfaction with a ferocious leer.

Ralph Farefield and his agent in crime then separated—the former hurrying away to some place of public resort, which he still deemed it prudent to frequent; and the latter proceeding to the tap-room of the boozing-ken, there to expend a portion of his gains in a deep carouse.

CHAPTER III.

THE HEIR.

RETURN we now to Saxondale Castle the inmates of which were thrown into the utmost grief, consternation, and dismay by the daring theft of the child. The nursemaid from whom the infant Edmund had been stolen, gave an account of the transaction similar to that which Chiffin the Cannibal gave to Ralph Farefield. She said that while walking on a little in front of the other servant, and while following the circuitous bend of the pathway which wound round a knot of trees standing on the river's bank about a quarter of a mile from the castle, a man with a black mask on his face suddenly rushed forth from amidst those trees; and tearing the child forcibly from her arms, sped away. She shrieked out and fell down senseless. It further appeared that the other nursemaid, hearing the cry, hastened to the spot, and was horror-stricken on finding her fellow-servant lying, as she thought, dead—and the infant gone. She caught sight of the ruffian just as he was springing over a hedge at some distance; and then he disappeared from her view. When recovering her presence of mind, she ascertained that her companion was not dead, but only in a swoon; and dipping her handkerchief into the river, she applied it to her countenance, and by those means brought her back to consciousness. Both the servant-maids, with the two remaining children, then hastened back as quickly as they could to the castle, and gave the alarm.

As we above stated, and as may easily be supposed, the consternation and grief caused by the astounding intelligence were immense. Lady Saxondale was at first absolutely petrified: but the old lord gave way to the most frenzied anguish. Her ladyship soon recovered her presence of mind; and the male dependants of the household were despatched in every direction in search of the lost infant. Some mounted horses and galloped away to beat the country: others set off on foot; and everything was done that the circumstances suggested to recover the stolen heir and capture the daring thief. Having issued her orders to this effect with a wonderful degree of calmness and self-possession, Lady Saxondale turned her attention to her afflicted husband, and endeavoured to console him by the representation that as these various measures had been adopted so soon after the theft, it was next to impossible that they could fail in achieving the desired result. But in her heart Lady Saxondale was really tortured by the sorest misgivings; and she apprehended the very worst. Both her own suspicions and those of her husband had at once very naturally fallen upon Ralph Farefield: but while the old lord could not bring himself to fancy anything so horrible as that his nephew would cause the child to be made away with, his wife on the other hand was unable to close her eyes to that dreadful eventuality.

Slowly, and Oh! how miserably passed the hours until night came: and then as one by one the servants returned without having obtained the slightest clue to the missing heir, Lord Saxondale began to yield to the same appalling terrors which his wife had already experienced. It was midnight ere all the messengers came back; and when the last made his appearance, with nothing better to report than the rest, the old lord again gave way to all the frantic bitterness of his grief. For a while, too, even Lady Saxondale's firmness of mind seemed to abandon her; and they mingled their tears, their sobs, and the outpourings of their heart's agony—that old man and his young wife!

But Lady Saxondale was the first to regain her fortitude and her self-possession; and she exerted all her powers to impart some solace to her husband. She now declared that, all things considered, she was persuaded in her own mind that Ralph Farefield, who no doubt was at the bottom of the atrocity, would not dare commit so heinous a crime as murder, nor yet allow it to be done; but that he had most probably caused the child to be carried off in order to bring his uncle to terms and wring from him immense pecuniary concessions. In this strain did her ladyship continue to argue for a long time, and with so much outward earnestness if not with an equal inward sincerity, that Lord Saxondale, eagerly catching at any straw of hope, gladly took refuge from the worst apprehensions in the adoption of his wife's theory. Thus the night passed; for no pillow was pressed by that couple throughout the long weary hours. When morning dawned, the servants were all again dispersed over the neighbourhood to make every kind of inquiry that might possibly tend to the recovery of the lost one. All the villages, hamlets, and isolated cottages, within a circuit of a dozen miles, were visited during this day; and when night came again and the servants returned, the meagre results of their inquiries amounted to these facts—that for the last few days some ill-looking men had been observed in the vicinage of the castle; that they had disappeared suddenly; and that a gang of gipsies had been also seen in those parts. But whether there were any connexion between the former and the latter it was impossible to say. As for the child, not the slightest trace had been discovered; and whether the poor infant was dead or alive seemed wrapped up in the darkest mystery. Finally, all the intelligence obtained went to prove that Mr. Ralph Farefield, who was well known in the neighbourhood, had not been seen by a single soul who was acquainted with him.

Lady Saxondale's resolution how to act was now promptly taken. She declared her intention of re-

pairing at once to London—not in an open manner, or for the purpose of calling on Ralph and taxing him with the crime of having had the child stolen; but of proceeding there in a private manner, under an assumed name, and with the object of instituting such inquiries as circumstances might suggest. Lord Saxondale proposed to accompany her; but she besought him to abandon such an idea. In the first place, he was so well known that his presence in the metropolis could scarcely be kept a secret from his nephew; in the second place, the researches in Lincolnshire must be persevered in, and it was therefore requisite for him to be upon the spot to superintend them; and in the third place, it was better for him to remain at Saxondale in case Ralph Farefield should forward any communication with the view of bringing him to terms, her ladyship still declaring her conviction that to this end had the atrocious outrage been perpetrated. To these reasonings on

the part of her ladyship did the old lord yield; and devoured with grief though he was—well nigh broken-hearted too by the terrible calamity—he could not help complimenting his wife upon her calmness, her fortitude, and her good sense under such distressing circumstances.

Lady Saxondale's principal tire-woman was a person of about thirty years of age,—discreet, prudent, and cool-headed,—one on whom reliance could be placed, and who was in every way qualified to share in a task requiring activity, energy, and determination. Her ladyship therefore resolved upon taking Mabel—for such was the woman's name—with her to London. A plain travelling carriage was got in readiness without delay—a few articles of the simplest apparel were packed up—and Lady Saxondale, accompanied by Mabel, took her departure for the metropolis.

In a couple of days Lord Saxondale received a letter from his wife announcing her safe arrival in London, and stating that she had engaged humble but comfortable lodgings at the house of a respectable widow lady of the name of Ferney, where she passed under the name of Smith. At the expiration of a week his lordship received a second letter, to the effect that his wife had already made discoveries of importance—that there was everything to hope—but that she could not enter into any particulars, not only through fear of the letter being intercepted, but likewise because every moment of her time was given up to the sacred task in which she was engaged. Some days later his lordship received a third letter, containing the joyful intelligence that Lady Saxondale had succeeded in ascertaining, beyond all possibility of doubt, that their beloved child was alive, though she had not as yet discovered where he was. She concluded by recommending her husband to keep the contents of her letters altogether to himself, as secrecy was for the present of the utmost consequence. The effect of this letter was to produce such a revulsion of feeling, from torturing suspense to ardent hope, and from harrowing fears to joyous anticipations, that the excitement proved too much for the old nobleman; and he became dangerously ill. The usual medical attendant was summoned; and Mr. Clifton, Lady Saxondale's father, was sent for: but in spite of their earnest solicitations, his lordship would not permit them to write to Lady Saxondale, for fear that she should at once hurry home and abandon the search that was progressing so favourably in London. In a week or ten days he got somewhat better; and then came another communication from his wife, announcing the joyous intelligence that she had discovered where their child was—that circumstances, which she would hereafter explain, prevented her from applying for the assistance of a magistrate in the affair—but that in a very few days she hoped to regain possession of the lost darling. This letter produced a most disastrous effect upon Lord Saxondale, illustrating the well-known proverb that happiness is sometimes as pernicious as misfortune in its influence upon the physical frame. The old nobleman suffered a relapse, and for some hours was in a dangerous condition. But when somewhat restored again, he still persisted in refusing to allow his wife to be written to: nor would he even say where she was;—and as he carefully destroyed her letters the moment he had read them, so as to prevent them falling into other hands, Mr. Clifton was unable to discover the slightest clue to his daughter's present abode.

But in the meantime what was Ralph Farefield doing in London? Since his interview with Chiffin at the boozing-ken he had regularly visited a coffee-house where the Lincolnshire newspapers were filed, in the hope of reading in their columns an account of the "mysterious murder" of the infant heir of Saxondale, and "discovery of the corpse." But a paragraph of a few lines, containing merely the fact that the child had been stolen from its nurse, was all that at first appeared in the local journals. On the occasion of each fresh arrival of these Lincolnshire prints, did Ralph scrutinize them paragraph after paragraph and line by line, in the expectation of reading the announcement which he so anxiously longed to behold: but nothing more was yet said upon the subject. At last, about three weeks after the occurrence, a paragraph of three or four lines appeared, merely adverting to the theft of the child, and expressing the editorial regret "that nothing had as yet transpired to clear up the uncertainty into which the calamity had plunged the noble family." It concluded by stating that "his lordship remained at the castle; but that her ladyship was gone, it was believed, on a visit to some relations, for change of air, and to recruit herself after the dreadful shock she had received." Ralph Farefield was both astonished and annoyed that the body was not discovered; and seeking out Chiffin, he questioned him very closely all over again relative to the whole affair. The cannibal at first swore furiously at being suspected; but when reduced to calmness by means of gold, he vowed and protested that the version he had originally given Ralph Farefield was the correct one.

"The Lincolnshire papers proved that the child was stolen," he added; "and that it was me who carried him off has been sufficiently shown to you by the production of the clothes, and by the mention of the mark on the little thing's shoulder. There are plenty of ways to account for why no fuss was made about the discovery of the body. The people of the cottage at whose door I left it, might have been frightened, and buried it secretly: or it might even have been put under ground in the usual manner, no one suspecting that it could possibly be Lord Saxondale's lost child, because the few clothes I left on it might have had no name or marks to show who the infant was. Or a resurrection man may have picked it up, and taken it to a doctor's. There's plenty of ways to account for why no noise was made about the corpse. At all events it was by your instructions that the body was left exposed in some public place; and I am not answerable if the thing has failed."

Ralph was compelled to be satisfied by this reasoning, which indeed was feasible enough. That the child had actually been made away with, he entertained no doubt; and though he could have wished that the discovery of the body should have established the fact, yet he argued that when his uncle died the title and estates must of necessity devolve to him who, in default of the appearance of any other claimant, should come forward and assert his own rights. Altogether unaware of Lady Saxondale's secret presence in London, he neither foresaw nor apprehended anything that could possibly arise to defeat his plans. Thus did a month elapse from the date of the child's disappearance:

and now, as Ralph was one morning examining the newly-arrived Lincolnshire papers, he was struck by observing a paragraph to the effect that "the venerable Lord Saxondale was lying in a most dangerous condition at the castle, and not expected to survive many days."

Overjoyed at this announcement, Ralph Farefield lost not a moment in ordering a post-chaise and proceeding into Lincolnshire. What could be more legitimate than that he, the heir presumptive, if not indeed the heir apparent, should thus hurry off to his uncle's death-bed on reading the news of his extreme danger in a public print? As he was whirled along in the post-chaise he gave free rein to the diabolical joy of his reflections. Was he not now touching upon the goal of success? Was he not about to reap the rich fruit of his plans? What though this triumphant success were gained by crime?—he cared not! Perish all contrition, all remorse, now that the acme of his hopes was about to be reached! Within a few hours, perhaps, he should hear himself saluted by the swelling titles of "my lord" and "lordship:" within a few hours, also, he would stand at a window whence the whole domain that stretched around would be his own! Peradventure his uncle was already no more, and he therefore Lord Saxondale and owner of the broad domain at that very moment? Such were his reflections. There was a maddening joy in them—an intoxication of bliss—a frenzy—a delirium. On sped the chaise—hours had passed—it was already entering the well-known territory of Lincolnshire. Ralph bade the postilions speed as if for their lives! Now the horses were changed for the last time—only eight miles from Saxondale—in three quarters of an hour he would be there. The blood seemed to gush like fire in his veins—but not with pain: it was with ecstacy—with the most fevered, throbbing, thrilling, burning delight.

And now the towers and battlemented buildings of Saxondale broke upon his view as the sun was descending to its western home; and Ralph literally bounded upon his seat inside the chaise. His impatience amounted to a wild fever-heat which water could not slake and wine would madden. On sped the chaise: and now he was suddenly struck with the necessity of assuming a calm demeanour. This he did: but it was an hypocrisy difficult to assume on the part of one whoin his own base mind felt that he had so many reasons for enthusiastic joy. The post-chaise dashed up to the front entrance of the castle: Ralph immediately looked out of the window, as one of the folding-doors slowly opened; and the instant his eye caught the countenance of the porter, he read the truth at once. Lord Saxondale was dead!

The servants came forth to receive their late master's nephew: but it was with no hurried step nor welcoming looks. They walked with measured tread and wore a grave demeanour, as men do where Death has just asserted his omnipotence. Nor did they exactly know in what manner to receive or address Ralph Farefield. Little skilled in the law, they were unable to decide whether he was now Lord Saxondale or not, inasmuch as though the infant heir was missing, there had been no positive proofs of the babe's death. As for what Lady Saxondale had done, or might be still doing in London or elsewhere—and as to any discoveries, more or less important, which she might have made—they were utterly ignorant on all these points, having been kept in the dark respecting her ladyship's proceedings.

Descending from the post-chaise, Ralph put a question to the servants, but in a manner which showed that he already anticipated the answer; and that answer was precisely the one he had alike expected and hoped. Lord Saxondale was indeed no more; but barely an hour had elapsed since the venerable peer breathed his last. Ralph, assuming as mournful a demeanour as he could possibly put on, desired one of the servants to conduct him to the apartment of the deceased; and this command was immediately obeyed. In a few minutes Ralph stood in the chamber of death, and by the couch in which his uncle had so recently expired. The Rev. Mr. Clifton and the surgeon withdrew from motives of respect; for whether the heir or not, at all events Ralph was too near a relative not to be treated courteously. Besides, it occurred to the worthy clergyman that the nephew might be stricken with remorse for his past conduct, and that he did not choose to have spectators of the feelings to which he might give vent. Alas! how little did the unsophisticated and well-meaning Mr. Clifton know of the true nature of the emotions that were now agitating within the breast of that bad man!

The nurse *did* however remain in the room. It was her privilege—a mournful one, but not the less sanctioned by custom—to remain with the dead; and Ralph, mindful of her presence, still retained that hypocritical air of sadness which he had put on for the occasion. He gazed upon the countenance of the deceased; and not for a single instant did his heart smite him at the thought that he himself in reality was the cause of his uncle's death. But while looking down upon that countenance which was now peaked, thin, sunken, and wan, beneath the finger of the Destroyer, his mind was wandering with the speed of a race-horse throughout the sumptuous apartments of the castle, and over the broad domain of Saxondale, all of which he looked upon as his own.

So engrossed was he in these thoughts, even while seeming to contemplate with sadness the face of the dead, that he did not hear the trampling of horses and the rapid rush of wheels—which sounds however did reach the chamber. Treading noiselessly over the thick carpet, the nurse, who had caught those sounds, approached the window; and slightly lifting the white blind, which was drawn completely down, she glanced forth. It was still daylight, and the nurse could see plainly enough all objects without. Quickly turning away from the window again, she whispered to Ralph, "It is her ladyship's travelling-carriage. Poor thing; I suppose she has come back."

"Ah!" ejaculated Ralph, startled from his reverie by this announcement: and then an expression of malignant triumph appeared upon his features, as he thought to himself that the moment was now at hand when he should be enabled to exhibit his hatred towards the being whom he had included amongst the number of those that had been such obstacles in his path.

"Hush!" said the old nurse, placing her finger upon her lip to remind him that so loud an ejaculation was but little suited to the solemnity of

the chamber of death; and at the same time she gazed upon him with a half-frightened, half-reproachful look, on account of that malignant expression which had swept over his features.

But Ralph, taking little heed of the old woman, advanced to the window; and raising the blind he looked out. The travelling-carriage was however drawn so close up to the entrance that he could not from that point obtain a view of those who alighted: so he turned away again, and once more approaching the bed, waited till Lady Saxondale should make her appearance: for he naturally conjectured that she would at once repair to the chamber of death.

Nor was he mistaken. In a few minutes the door opened slowly, and her ladyship entered. She had thrown off her bonnet and shawl, and appeared in a simple morning wrapper, in which she had travelled: for she also had left London that morning in the utmost haste, the instant she read in the Lincolnshire paper, which had happened to reach her, the announcement respecting her husband's danger.

And now Lady Saxondale and Ralph met face to face. That same expression of malignity which a few minutes before had appeared upon his features, rose up again: but instead of cowering or quailing beneath it, the dark eyes of Lady Saxondale flashed upon him a look of mingled defiance and contempt. The next moment she was upon her knees by the side of the couch of death; and her head was bowed down upon the cold hand of her departed husband. In this position she remained for several minutes; and a solemn silence prevailed in the room—a silence which not even Ralph dared interrupt. It was not any violent paroxysm of grief in which the lady testified her sorrow for her loss: her's was a mind that retained its woe inwardly. But that she did feel—and deeply feel—the death of the old man who had been so kind, and good, and affectionate towards her, there can be no doubt. Besides, when she slowly rose again from her kneeling posture, there were tears upon the cold marble hand of the deceased—tears which she had shed silently!

She stood for several minutes more gazing down upon the lifeless features of the old lord; and her own countenance was fixed and rigid, but with that deep and even awful calm which indicated that there was a powerful agitation of feelings within. Then she stooped down and imprinted a kiss upon the forehead of the dead; and as she slowly turned away, her looks once more encountered those of Ralph, whose presence for the last few minutes she seemed altogether to have forgotten.

"Madam," he said, in a low deep voice, "it must be upwards of five years since last we met. Little *then* did plain Miss Clifton imagine that when next we met, she would be Lady Saxondale: although it was probable enough that I should be what I now am—Lord Saxondale!"

"No, sir," she answered, with grave solemnity: "you are still plain Mr. Ralph Farefield."

"How, madam?" he cried, with mingled menace and alarm.

"Because, sir," she responded, "I have recovered my child; and the infant Lord Saxondale is at the present moment beneath this roof:—then, with so peculiar a look that it struck dismay to Ralph's heart, she turned round and slowly quitted the room.

He immediately followed her,—horrible feelings raging in his soul. His thoughts had in a moment been plunged into a frenzied whirl: there seemed to be madness in his brain. Had he been deceived by Chiffin? or was Lady Saxondale deceiving him? Had not the child been made away with? or if it had, was her ladyship trying to palm off a supposititious one upon the world as her own? But he would soon know! Ah, perhaps she did not think that he was aware of that mark upon the shoulder, the presence of which could alone prove the identity, and the absence of which would at once stamp the fraud!

He overtook her as she was proceeding to the nearest drawing-room.

"Your ladyship says that the child is found?" he muttered between his set teeth: and though he endeavoured to master his emotions and appear collected and cool, yet he could not.

"I said so—and it is the truth," replied Lady Saxondale, calmly and gravely, as she had previously addressed him in the death-chamber.

"We shall see!" he said: and the words came hissing from his lips as if from those of a serpent; for his feelings were terrible—all the more terrible because so concentrated and it was impossible to allow them free vent.

"Sir, do you dare doubt me?" demanded Lady Saxondale, stopping abruptly short and turning upon him the full power of her looks.

He staggered back for a moment; for it struck him that there was something so confident and so full of assurance on her part that it was impossible she could be practising a deception; and his countenance became ghastly, while a sickening sense of utter desolation and wretchedness seized upon his soul. Lady Saxondale's eyes lingered upon him but for a moment: and then she pursued her way towards the drawing-room. Again mastering his emotions, and clutching at the hope that her's was the attempt of a desperate woman to carry a tremendous deceit with a high hand, he followed her into the apartment.

And there, sure enough, was a child in the arms of Mabel; and worthy Mr. Clifton was bending down and saying all kinds of affectionate and tender things to it, just as if the little innocent were perfectly capable of comprehending these ebullitions of heartfelt feeling on the part of its grandfather. The surgeon was standing by, contemplating the scene with ineffable satisfaction.

Lady Saxondale advanced and took the child in her arms,—pressing it to her bosom in a manner that was as much as to imply no earthly power should now snatch it from her. It was only with a superhuman effort that Ralph could still master the feelings which were constituting a perfect hell within his breast; but it was still with a lingering ghastliness on the countenance and with pale quivering lips that he approached the group.

"This, then," he said, "is my little cousin, the lost child?"

"God in his mercy be thanked for the dear babe's restoration!" exclaimed the Rev. Mr. Clifton in a fervid tone. "Poor little innocent! He is somewhat thinner and paler than when last I saw him; but I should have known him, for all that, amongst a thousand—aye, and a thousand miles off too!" added the worthy gentleman. "There are the same pretty eyes; and the very

dimple on the chin likewise lingers, though the sweet face has lost somewhat of his chubbiness. Poor little thing! Doubtless it has not been so well cared for as when beneath this roof. But we will take care that the darling shall not be torn from us again."

And desisting for a moment from his enthusiastic rhapsodies, the good old gentleman bent his eyes upon Ralph, as much as to say that he was at no loss to conjecture whose wickedness it was that had led to the temporary abstraction of the infant.

"Without for a single moment wishing to create any bad feeling," said Ralph, not choosing to notice Mr. Clifton's significant regards, "but as a matter of common justice to myself——And I am sure," he added, suddenly turning towards the surgeon, "this gentleman, as a disinterested person, will acquit me of any impropriety——"

"Oh! I understand you, sir," interrupted Lady Saxondale, with a somewhat haughty air: "you wish to be assured that this is indeed the beloved child that was lost? I might observe that it is only those who are themselves capable of actions the vilest and the basest, that entertain kindred suspicions of others: but in the solemn circumstances which have brought you hither, sir, I will raise no subject for indecorous altercation. Nay, I will even admit that it is natural for you to insist upon receiving those proofs to which you have alluded."

"Perhaps, then, your ladyship," said Ralph, "will condescend to explain how you recovered possession of your son: because, well-meaning and honourably-intentioned as your ladyship may be, guarantees must be afforded that no deception has been practised towards yourself by any one who may have been instrumental in consigning *that* child to your care."

"Sir," answered Lady Saxondale, "this interview is for many reasons too painful to be prolonged; and therefore you will pardon me for declining to enter upon any verbal explanations at all. Nature herself has afforded the means of giving you the best proof that can possibly exist. This gentleman," she added, flinging a glance towards the surgeon, "received my son at its birth, and can no doubt testify to its identity with the child I now hold in my arms."

Thus speaking, Lady Saxondale sat down; and retaining the babe upon her lap, she calmly and deliberately proceeded to unfasten its clothing. Ralph watched her with a suspense that was truly awful to endure. He watched her thus, not only with intense anxiety to see whether the mark would actually appear upon the child's shoulder; but also did he watch her to observe whether any trouble was in her own looks—any betrayal on her part of conscious deception! But no: a grave solemnity sat upon her handsome countenance; and not a finger trembled, nor even appeared to hesitate to do its work, as she unfastened the strings of the babe's clothing. This process did not occupy more than half a minute; but in Ralph's estimation it seemed whole hours—and therein were concentrated the agonies, the tortures, and the excruciations of centuries. At length it was done: the garments were pulled down—and the mark of the strawberry appeared upon the child's shoulder!

Ralph felt annihilated. He moved not—bespoke not—he scarcely seemed to breathe: but statue-like he stood transfixed, unutterable thoughts working upon his ghastly countenance. At the same time, the surgeon, with the methodical precision which is characteristic of his profession, and not with the slightest idea of positively satisfying himself upon the point,—for there was not a doubt upon his mind which required clearing up at all—bent down and for a few moments scrutinized the mark.

"Yes," he said, lifting his head again: "if I were on my death-bed, I could unhesitatingly swear to it."

"As a matter of course, madam, I have not another word to say," murmured Ralph, with sickness at the heart and dizziness in the brain: and then he stood staring with mingled vacancy and wildness upon the infant, as Lady Saxondale calmly and deliberately proceeded to tie the strings of its clothes again.

When this was done Lady Saxondale gave the child to Mabel; and rising from her seat, she said, "Mr. Farefield, if you wish to attend your late uncle's remains to the tomb, I cannot for a single moment offer any objection."

"Madam!" he ejaculated, starting as if from a dream: then somewhat recovering himself, he appeared to hesitate for a few moments. "Will you allow me to say one word to your ladyship in private?"

"Not in any other privacy than this," she answered, walking into the recess of the window that was remotest from the group: and as the room was very spacious, the distance was sufficient to place them beyond earshot—for Ralph at once followed her to that recess.

"Madam," he said, with the look and voice of an utterly broken and helpless man. "I am well aware that I ought to expect no favour from your ladyship. But still I would venture to beseech that you do not altogether suffer me to go forth penniless upon the wide world. For that my uncle has mentioned my name in his will, I cannot entertain the slightest expectation."

"And I am sure that he has *not*," answered Lady Saxondale. "But I do not wish to deal too severely with you, Mr. Farefield," she immediately added; "though heaven knows! I have suffered enough through your wickedness."

His looks quailed beneath the meaning glance which she bent upon him with the full power of her dark eyes; and he murmuringly said, "I thank you at least for the few cheering words which preceded the latter portion of your speech. Tell me, is my presence within these walls hateful to your ladyship? If so, give me the means, and I will depart at once——But without them I cannot: for it is a beggar—a veritable beggar—that you see before you!"

Lady Saxondale appeared to reflect for some moments: and then she said with more rapid utterance than she had previously used, "When we were boy and girl, Ralph Farefield, we were companions; and often and often have we played together, as happy joyous children, in those gardens. I cannot think of all *that* and not feel some little sympathy on your behalf——though, God knows, you do not deserve it! But you cannot remain here: you must depart to-morrow—and I have many things to say to you——Do not mistake me: it is merely what I purpose to do for your welfare that I wish to speak to you about. At the same time I do not choose that others"—and she glanced over her shoulder towards the spot

where her father and the surgeon were conversing together close by Mabel and the child—"should think that from any protracted conversation between us, I am either led by your entreaties or my own good feeling to do what you so little deserve. Retire, then, for the present, to a room which will be prepared for you; and to-night, at eleven o'clock, meet me in the chapel. You know your way thither, and the doors will be open."

She then bowed with distant coolness so as to have the appearance of exercising a haughty dignity to put an end to a discourse which should be continued no longer; and she turned to rejoin the group at the other extremity of the room.

Ralph, who had listened with mingled astonishment and reviving hope to the singular speech which Lady Saxondale had thus delivered with rapid utterance, remained rooted to the spot for a few moments: but speedily recovering himself, he hastened from the apartment.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHAPEL.

THE clock in the tower over the entrance of Saxondale Castle, was proclaiming the hour of eleven with its deep metallic tone, as Ralph, having threaded the various passages and corridors leading towards the chapel, entered that place of appointment. The wax candle which he carried in one hand and shaded with the other to protect the light from the draught, threw but a dismal, sickly gleam around—rather enhancing than dispelling the gloom of the place; while the open arched entrance into the cloister containing the tombs and the statue, seemed the mouth of a cavern of pitchy blackness.

Ralph Farefield was not however the man to give way to superstitious feelings: the selfish concerns of the known world were too absorbing to allow his imagination to wander to that unknown world whence spirits are conjured up. Placing the candle in a niche, so as to secure it from the draught, he leant against the wall with folded arms, awaiting Lady Saxondale, who had not yet made her appearance. Her conduct had both surprised and perplexed Ralph Farefield. What could she mean? why this mysterious appointment? Could she not have managed some other place and hour for a meeting? and did she not actually compromise her reputation by the course she was adopting? Was it possible that she had conceived a passion for him? Naturally good-looking and of a strong constitution, he bore but few traces of the debauched and profligate life which he had led; and being tall, slender, and well-formed, it might not be considered an overweening vanity on his part, if he entertained the supposition that a young and impassioned woman had really fallen in love with him. Besides, he was not more than five-and-twenty—only four years older than Lady Saxondale herself: and thus, everything considered, he seemed warranted in entertaining that belief. But if it should prove incorrect, then must he suppose her conduct to be instigated by that scintillation of friendly feeling to which she had alluded, and which she described as being conjured up by the recollections of earlier days, when as boy and girl they were playmates together? Or if even this supposition did not account for her behaviour towards him, was it that she had special reasons of her own for wishing to get him away from the castle as soon as possible, and that she really had no other opportunity of carrying her views into execution except by means of the earliest and most secret appointment which at the moment she had been able to think of?

While revolving these various speculations in his mind, Ralph Farefield heard a light step approaching along the corridor towards the chapel-door, which he had left ajar; and in a few moments Lady Saxondale made her appearance, also with a wax-taper in her hand. Ralph at once saw that she was pale—very pale: but her countenance gave no other indication of any feelings which might be agitating in her bosom. Closing the door, but not fastening it, she approached him with slow step; and placing the candle in the same niche where he had deposited his own, she said, "Mr. Farefield, you are doubtless surprised—indeed, you *must* be—at my conduct. It may appear indecorous—it may even warrant you in entertaining an evil opinion with regard to me. Therefore, let me at once assure you that the motives which prompt me to act with kindness towards you, and the considerations which have compelled me to render our meeting as secret as possible, are precisely and exactly those which I stated this evening when in the drawing-room."

While Lady Saxondale was thus speaking, she assumed a certain dignity of manner which even more than her words convinced Ralph that his supposition of her having fallen in love with him was altogether unfounded. He was therefore compelled to believe himself the object of her sympathy alone; and he accordingly looked as humble, contrite, and submissive as he possibly could.

"But in addition to the motives already explained for making an appointment here," continued Lady Saxondale, "I had another which will presently appear. Listen to what I have to say.

"Until the birth of a son and heir, your late uncle experienced considerable uneasiness on my account, knowing that in the ordinary course of nature his death must take place many years before my own. In consequence of the stringent terms of the entail which, had our marriage produced no heir, would have given the entire property to you, the only means by which your late uncle could make a provision for me was by saving as much ready money as possible: for previous to our marriage his lordship had none put by. With a view therefore to economy, we remained altogether at the castle, and did not visit the metropolis during the season. The result of his lordship's savings has been close upon twenty thousand pounds; and this money——But, ah!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, suddenly interrupting herself, as if a thought had struck her: "if I tell you where this money is concealed——"

"I understand your ladyship," said Ralph, perceiving that she hesitated. "You generously intend to give me a portion; and you would ask what guarantee there is that I will not by force and violence possess myself of the whole? Madam, think you that while receiving your bounty, I am capable of such black villany——"

"No—I will not entertain so evil an opinion of human nature," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "It is my purpose to give you five thousand pounds

of that money; and if you reform your mode of life, depend upon it that I will not be unmindful of you, to the extent of such means as, during the minority of my son, circumstances may place within my reach. But as a condition of what I am now doing for you, I insist upon your departure from the castle; and what I may hereafter do is likewise subject to the condition that you never come near these walls again."

Of course Ralph Farefield readily promised everything that Lady Saxondale required: but his submissiveness, his gratitude, and his contrition—all of which he took pains to exhibit—were but a detestable hypocrisy; for in his own mind he was resolved to take immediate possession of the whole twenty thousand pounds of which her ladyship had spoken, and in due time adopt fresh measures for removing the infant heir from his path.

"Now, Mr. Farefield," continued Lady Saxondale, "we are about to proceed together into the vaults beneath this chapel: for *there* is the treasure concealed in a strong chest. But as I am thus compelled to trust myself in such a place and at such an hour, you will not think it imprudent on my part to have adopted some little precaution. Take one of those candles, and just look forth from the door. You need make no observation from your lips."

Ralph Farefield did as he was desired; and taking the candle, he advanced to the chapel-door—opened it—and looked forth into the passage. There he beheld Mabel, her ladyship's confidential tirewoman, standing in the middle of the corridor.

"Leave that door open," said Lady Saxondale.

Ralph obeyed this command likewise, and retraced his steps to the spot where her ladyship was standing.

Taking down her own candle from the niche, she said, "Now come with me. But I would rather you should proceed in front."

"Madam," he answered, "I am sorry that you entertain such a dreadful opinion relative to me——"

"Let us not make any unnecessary comments," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Proceed."

"Shall we not light one of these torches?" he asked, glancing towards a couple which rested in iron rings fastened to the wall: "for I presume we are about to descend into the vaults——"

"No—the candles will do," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "Proceed."

Ralph accordingly led the way into the vestiary, Lady Saxondale following close behind. By her direction he opened the low door communicating with the flight of stone steps leading into the vaults: and they descended together.

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On the fourth night after the incidents just related, and as the clock was proclaiming the hour of twelve, the inmates of the castle were suddenly alarmed by a cry that burglars had broken in. This cry emanated from Mabel, who was passing from her mistress's chamber to her own, and who observed the figures of three or four men creeping stealthily along the corridor. In a few minutes the entire household was aroused; and the men-servants, arming themselves with such offensive and defensive weapons as came readily to hand, commenced an immediate search over the premises.

In consequence of the vastness of the building and the number of rooms, passages, corridors, and nooks that had to be thus searched, the investigation occupied a good hour; and though there were evident traces of a burglarious entry having been really effected, it seemed equally clear that the thieves had got safe off again—for they could not be discovered.

These burglars were none other than Chiffin the Cannibal and three of his infamous associates. Having seen in a London paper the paragraph relative to the old lord's illness, which had been copied from the Lincolnshire journal, Chiffin had at once called at Ralph Farefield's lodging; but on arriving there, he learnt that Mr. Farefield had gone down the previous day into Lincolnshire. Chiffin, thinking that his services might possibly be required—or perhaps having the intention of being one of the first to pay his respects to the new Lord Saxondale—set off with three of his associates into Lincolnshire. But on arriving in the neighbourhood of the castle and making secret inquiries, they learnt that Lady Saxondale had recovered her lost child—that the old lord was dead—and that Ralph Farefield had departed suddenly after a stay of only a very few hours. Whatever Chiffin might have thought relative to the restoration of the infant heir of Saxondale to its mother's bosom, is of no consequence at present; suffice it to say that finding, as he himself observed, it was "all up" with Ralph Farefield, neither he nor his associates were the men to have come down into Lincolnshire for nothing. They accordingly resolved to pay a visit to the interior of the castle, and self-appropriate whatsoever they could lay their hands upon.

The burglarious entrance was effected; but as the four villains were creeping along one of the passages, the alarm was suddenly given by Mabel, as above described. To retreat by the same way they had entered was now impossible; and hurrying along at random, the burglars reached the western side of the castle. There they paused—listened—and finding that all was still, took a rapid view, by means of a dark lantern, of the place where they had thus halted. A door was standing open a little farther on: they pursued their investigation, and found that it led into the chapel. From a window in the corridor they saw lights moving quickly about in the other parts of the buildings overlooking the quadrangle: it was therefore evident the household was on the alert. Without farther deliberation they sought refuge in the chapel, and found their way to the vestiary, which they at first fancied was a means of egress. Opening the door leading down upon the flight of steps, they were about to prosecute their search for an avenue of escape, when the lantern went out, the candle being all exhausted. They were now involved in the pitchy blackness of that place: but passing in upon the steps, they closed the door, resolving to wait the issue of events. Presently they heard voices in the chapel, which the domestics were searching as well as every other part of the premises. The servants even penetrated into the vestiary; and the burglars resolved, if discovered, to make the most desperate resistance. But the servants, not for a moment fancying that the burglars were likely to

have taken refuge in the vaults, and perhaps being anxious to get away from that gloomy place as speedily as possible, contented themselves with merely searching the vestiary; and seeing no one, sped off to pursue their investigations elsewhere.

The burglars suffered a good half-hour to elapse ere they made a move from their place of concealment. They did not dare descend the steps with the chance of plunging into this perilous gulf: so they decided upon issuing from the stone stairs. But when they did emerge forth again, they scarcely knew how to act, being involved as they were in utter darkness. They had the means about them of striking a light, but no candle to light. There consequently seemed no alternative but to grope their way out of the chapel, and trust to chance for effecting a safe issue from the castle. While they were thus guiding themselves by feeling the walls with their hands, Chiffin, who was foremost, suddenly encountered an iron ring in which something was stuck; and by the touch he at once knew it to be a torch. Lighting a match, he discovered that it was so; and close by, in a second ring, was another torch. These torches, we should observe, were always kept in the chapel for use when visitors were shown over that part of the building when it was dusk or dark, the glare of torches giving a far more powerful light than mere lamps or candles for the inspection of the tombs and monuments.

The discovery of these torches was hailed with joy by the burglars; and after a few moments' deliberation they determined upon seeking for the means of issue by that flight of steps where they had remained concealed, but down which they had not dared to venture in the pitchy darkness. Taking the two torches with them into the vestiary, they lighted them there, and descended the circular flight of stone stairs. This descent was very deep; but at length it seemed to terminate in some caverned subterranean: and now the glare of the torches was reflected upon the surface of water. The vaults were flooded from the leakings of the Trent which rolled above them.

But, ah! why springs that ejaculation of astonishment from the lips of Chiffin? It is because the glare of the torches has suddenly revealed to his eyes the face of a corpse floating upon the water. And that first ejaculation is immediately followed by a second, as he recognizes the countenance of Ralph Farefield.

The burglars stood gazing in silent wonder upon the dead body, until it sluggishly floated to the very foot of the steps; and then Chiffin, stooping down, stretched forth his hand, and grasping the collar of the drowned man's coat, drew the corpse up the steps. It was but little changed, and did not seem as if it had been in the water more than three or four days. But it was not with any hope of restoring life, nor with the least intention of giving any alarm relative to this discovery, that the burglars dragged forth the dead body from the flood: it was for the simple purpose of rifling its pockets of whatsoever they might contain. Having done this, and possessing themselves of the little jewellery and slender stock of money which Ralph had about him at the time when he met his death, Chiffin and his associates left the corpse lying upon the steps; and finding that there was no avenue of escape in that direction, they retraced their way up into the chapel. Here they were compelled to extinguish their torches, lest the glare shining through the windows might attract attention: but as the castle was now once more quiet, they experienced little difficulty in accomplishing a safe retreat from the premises.

CHAPTER V.

THE OPERA-BOX.

NINETEEN years had elapsed since the occurrences at Saxondale castle,—nineteen pinions shed from the wing of Time and abandoned to the past, while he sweeps onward through the infinite mazes of Eternity! Yes—nineteen years had merged into the cumulating mass of centuries that are of bygone date;—and this leap which our story accomplishes, brings us to the middle of 1844.

It was on a Saturday night, in the month of June, in the year just named, that the Opera was more than usually crowded. Thither had flocked the fair, the noble, the rich, and the high-born; and to all outward appearance, happiness was in every heart. The whole sweeping range of first-tier boxes were resplendent with diamonds, sparkling above lofty brows, upon glossy hair, around snowy necks, pendant to delicate ears, or circling arms as white as snow-flakes as they reclined gracefully on the crimson-cushioned parapet. Bright as those gems, too, shone beauty's eyes; white as the pearls that blended their chaster attractions with those of the glittering gems, were the teeth which were revealed in smiles between the parting roses of the lips.

In respect to the male companions of those fair ones, we may observe that elegance and taste, and highest fashion characterized their apparel: spotless were the gloves, snowy the white waistcoats and gorgeous the figured ones, unexceptionable the tie of the cravats, and brilliant the mirrored surface of the varnished boots, whose material was scarcely even of brown-paper thickness.

The scene was resplendent beyond description, —appearing to be a reflex of fairy-land with the combined glories of diamonds, pearls, splendid apparel, woman's charms, and the superb decorations of the theatre, and the flood of dazzling lustre pouring upon all. From the stage rolled the full tide of song, with the splendid majesty of Lablache, Rossini, and Grisi. Smiles were on every countenance —rapture danced in beaming eyes—and then plaudits escaped from every lip, the well-bred listlessness of aristocracy and fashion yielding to the electric impulse which thrilled around and giving vent to a burst of momentary enthusiasm.

But of the first-tier boxes there was one whose charming occupants must specially demand our notice. The group, at this particular instant when we thus seek to rivet the reader's attention upon that box, consisted of four young ladies; and vainly amidst the brilliant galaxy of beauty filling the whole theatre, might the eye seek for brighter stars of loveliness than those. They were all four apparelled in the richest manner—all of fine figure, elegant bearing, and surpassing beauty. On the crimson-cushioned parapet of the box were opera-glasses and *bouquets*, the latter diffusing a

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soft and refreshing fragrance through the otherwise heated and heavy atmosphere.

Beautiful as the four young ladies were, yet the loveliness of one outshone that of her three companions. Arrayed in a dress of white brocaded satin, fitting tight to the bust, but the skirt of which flowed down in heavy waves of silver, she had all the advantage of magnificent apparel to enhance the surprising lustre of her charms. But even had she been attired in the simplest costume, her's was a loveliness alike too splendid and too fascinating not to attract general notice. Tall, even to the full height of the proudest womanhood, she blended the stateliness of this imposing stature with the softer traits of delicate, interesting, and enchanting beauty. Her shape, though perfectly symmetrical, was characterized by gorgeous developments: but the gracefully voluptuous contours were replete with the virgin freshness of youth. Though of the most striking appearance, there seemed to be a halo of innocence and a perfume of chastity about her, calculated to win the heart even more than her splendid loveliness excited the passions. Her hair was of dark auburn, arranged in bands, — a wreath of artificial leaves, gemmed with sparkling diamonds, setting off the Grecian knot at the back of the well-shaped head. Her arms, bare to the shoulders, were ornamented with bracelets that delineated the roundness of their exquisite modelling; and their dazzling whiteness, as well as that of her splendid bust, outshone even her snowy drapery. One delicately gloved hand held an embroidered kerchief: the fingers of the other negligently retained the fan which was more for ornament than for use – as there was nothing artificial, nothing coquettish about this resplendent creature.

Her nose was perfectly straight—her countenance classically faultless, with the pure Phidian outline that marks high birth, delineating the short upper lip, the delicately-rounded chin, and the high forehead. Her eyes had those almond-shaped orbits which so seldom belong to English beauty, but which are deemed the excelling charm of Italian loveliness; and the pupils, of the deepest, clearest blue, seemed to swim in a field of bluish lustre like that of the finest mother-of-peril. When her lips parted slightly, in the hushed rapture with which she listened to the glorious tide of song rolling through the house, the teeth of whitest ivory were visible between the vermillion lines of that sweet mouth. Her companion has already been described as dazzlingly fair: but upon the cheeks the white of the lily deepened by degrees into a soft and pure carnation, which no art could imitate, but which seemed too beautiful to be real. Natural however it was, and forming not the least bewitching trait of that exceeding beauty which combined so much delicacy and sweetness with such magnificence and grandeur.

Such was Lady Florina Staunton, at that delicious age of nineteen when having burst into the glories of a somewhat early womanhood, so far as related to the rich developments of her form, she unconsciously as it were breathed and looked the innocent voluptuousness of nature in full blow: and as the looks of the observer wandered from charm to charm and from beauty to beauty, it would seem as if there were no resting-place for the eye while thus gliding from grace to grace in endless succession. It dared not settle upon the brow, for that was too dazzling; nor upon the eyes, for the heart would be left in their depths nor upon the lips, for they were too inviting; nor upon the bosom, for that was too pure. In a word, it was impossible for the most indifferent observer—even the veriest anchorite — to contemplate without emotion that enchanting creature in whom sweetness combined with splendour, brilliancy with softness, and magnificence with chastity.

She was unmarried, but engaged to be united to a young nobleman of about her own age—yet little fitted in other respects to be the accepted suitor of so divine a being. This nobleman was Edmund, Lord Saxondale, whom we shall very shortly describe.

Although Lady Florina Staunton and her three young friends were seated alone in the box, at the moment when we thus introduce them to our readers, yet they had not arrived at the Opera unattended by male companions. Lord Harold Staunton, Florina's brother,—and Lord Saxondale, her suitor,—had been their escort: but these two young noblemen had stepped out for a few minutes, with the pretext of saying a word to some acquaintances in another box, but really for the purpose of going behind the scenes and bestowing their flippant impertinences upon any of the ballet-girls who might choose to listen to them. Lord Harold Staunton was a fine, tall, handsome young man of three-and-twenty, but was a confirmed rake and accomplished *roué*. He and his sister were orphans, the young lady residing with an aunt, but Lord Harold occupied lodgings in Jermyn Street. He and Lord Saxondale were upon the most intimate terms, and were inseparably together. Not that this bond of union was really cemented by the sacred feeling of friendship, neither of them possessing a heart capable of such a pure and elevated sentiment And yet the tie that held them together, was, at least for the present, binding enough. It was that intimacy which, so often prevailing amongst dissipated young men in high life, rendered them mutually necessary and useful. For on the one hand Lord Harold was poor, and indeed totally dependent on the bounty of his relatives; therefore it was very convenient for him to be enabled to make use of Lord Saxondale's purse, which was well filled by the handsome allowance he enjoyed during his minority. On the other hand Lord Saxondale was proud of the friendship of such a fine, dashing, high-spirited fellow as Lord Harold Staunton, who was moreover a general favourite with the ladies, was acquainted with everybody "worth knowing" about town, and possessed a most familiar knowledge of all the places of amusement, high or low, that are resorted to by profligate fashionables and dissolute aristocrats.

And now a few words more relative to Edmund, the bearer of the proud title of Saxondale, ere we proceed continuously with our narrative. He was a couple of months past nineteen years of age—short in statue, thin, and slightly made —not exactly ugly, but very far from good-looking, with hair of that suspicious kind of yellowish brown that in certain lights look reddish, and with eyes which only by a complimentary fiction could be pronounced blue, but might more properly be described as greenish grey. He had good teeth, which were a considerable saving clause in his

features; and his countenance, utterly devoid of the aquiline outline which so proudly characterized his mother's face, had something mean and ignoble not merely in its configuration, but also in its expression. His voice, naturally weak and inharmonious, was rendered still more unpleasant by an affectation of those cracked tones which are assumed by the abominable coxcombs of these days. It did not require a very searching look to read his character; a glance would fathom it. Frivolous-minded, addicted to vicious pleasures and dissipated pursuits—selfish, and utterly incapable of generous actions—vain, conceited, and insufferably impudent withal — ignorant, prejudiced, and believing that because he was a nobleman, he must necessarily be a demigod towering above the common mass of humanity—spiteful, malignant, and vindictive, so as to be a cowardly tyrant to his inferiors, and an object of terror or dislike with all those to whom he dared manifest his miserable despotism—quarrelsome as a brother, disobedient as a son, and capricious towards everybody—the youthful possessor of the haughty name of Saxondale was as detestable a character as ever filled amidst the human species that same kind of place which reptiles occupy in the brute creation.

As a matter of course, Edmund had gone through all the various degrees and grades of training which constitutes an English nobleman's education. At home, either at Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire or at the town-mansion in Park Lane, he had from his earliest years been taught his consequence in being "my-lorded" by thick-headed tenant-farmers or obsequious domestics. He had passed through Eton with a tutor at his elbow to do his exercises for him, and save him from the kickings and cuffings to which his peevishness and malignity daily and hourly exposed him at the hands of other boys. Then he had spent a year at Cambridge, where he was tufted and toaded, and took degrees in debauchery instead of the classics; and then he drove for a few months over France and Germany in a travelling chariot, emblazoned on the panels to show his rank, and with his tutor to speak for him in the language which he himself but dimly comprehended. Having returned to England after this trip, he was immediately caught up by Lord Harold Staunton, who had just sent the last human pigeon he had plucked to the Queen's Bench, and who therefore considered the rich young Saxondale a perfect godsend at that particular moment. And in this way had Lord Saxondale been qualified and was still qualifying to fill the post of an hereditary legislator, when in a year and ten months' time the day of his majority would arrive. What advantage the councils of the nation were likely to derive from the assistance of such an individual, when he should take his seat there, we must leave our readers to determine. But very certain it was that young Lord Saxondale was, as far as intellectual accomplishments went, an average sample of his class. Being ignorant of the laws of God, and nature, and humanity, it was not likely he should be better acquainted with those of his country. He had learned to write, it is true; but his hand was scarcely intelligible—and this, by the by, is a proof of high-breeding, because in fashionable life a good hand is clerkish and it is "uncommonly vulgar" to be able to express one-self legibly upon paper. Then as to arithmetic, he knew nothing; who ever heard of a lord condescending to keep his own accounts? He spoke the English language correctly; because this was a mere parrot-like qualification which he could not well help attaining: but as for any other modern languages, he only had the merest smattering of French and the vaguest idea of German—the dead languages being considered the most useful at Eton and Cambridge. As for history, he only knew two things; one was that the Saxondales had taken their origin in the time of the Tudors, and the other that the English had beaten the French at Waterloo; and therefore he was proud of being both a Saxondale and an Englishman.

Having thus sketched, as far as it is at present necessary, the character of Lord Saxondale—and having likewise previously glanced at that of Lord Harold Staunton—we may resume the thread of our narrative. To proceed, then, we must state that after an absence of three quarters of an hour from the box where Lady Florina and her three young friends were seated, the two noblemen returned thither,—their countenances somewhat flushed and their breath having a vinous odour; for they had been drinking champagne (which young Saxondale had paid for) behind the scenes. A close observer might have noticed that it was with something very much like a look of aversion and a sort of inward shrinking, as if of downright loathing and disgust, that the beauteous Florina met the half-insolent half-familiar gaze of her accepted suitor when he thus re-entered the box in company with her brother. But his own egregious vanity would not permit him rightly to interpret this transient evidence of emotion on her part, even if he had perceived it; for he actually imagined that the beauteous girl was over head and ears in love with him.

"Well, Flo, did you miss us?" asked her brother, Lord Harold: "did you think we were lost?"

"To be sure! your sister was dying with impatience till we came back," interjected Edmund, before the young lady had time to make any answer. "Now, tell me the truth, Florina," he said, bending down over the back of the chair; weren't you watching the door in anxious expectation that it would open every minute?"

"I certainly thought that your lordship and Harold left us rather too long by ourselves," answered Florina, in a soft, flute-like voice. "But while you were absent, Grisi has given us some splendid outpourings of melody; and——"

But she stopped short; for she was about to add that having been so much engrossed with the music and the singing, she had not particularly missed either her brother or her intended husband.

Lord Saxondale turned to address a few observations to the other three young ladies; and Harold, bending down till his lips nearly touched his sister's ear, whispered hurriedly and angrily, "You should not treat Saxondale with such coldness. Hitherto his vanity has prevented him from seeing it; but he must observe it in time if it continues; and then——"

"And then—— what?" asked Florina, turning partially round and fixing her eyes steadily upon her brother's countenance.

"And then he might break off the match," replied Harold. "Not but that he is madly in love with you——"

"If my happiness were consulted, Harold, in this matter," rejoined Florina, the tones of her voice now flowing in that clouded contralto which is ever so touchingly expressive of a deep pathos, "the sooner the engagement were broken of the better."

"Pooh, nonsense, Flo!" returned Lord Harold angrily. "You know it will be a brilliant thing for you——"

"At all events we will not discuss the question again—nor here," interrupted Lady Florina, as tears started forth upon the long dark lashes of her superb blue eyes; but she instantaneously wiped them away.

"Now, in a few minutes," said Lord Saxondale, turning again towards his intended, "we shall have the fair *debutante*. I just now learnt that the reports which have appeared in the newspapers are not a bit exaggerated: and this is a wonder—for the journals do lie so confoundedly. But I am told that in the present case there was really no scope for lying in respect to the beauty of this Signora Vivaldi who is to appear for the first time to-night."

"Did you receive that intelligence from the friends in a neighbouring box, to whom you and Harold went to speak a few words?"—and as Lady Florina put this question, there was a gleam of contempt in her looks and a tinge of sarcasm in her accents, as if she guessed full well whither the two young noblemen had really been: but the next moment resuming her wonted serene yet somewhat pensive sweetness of look, as if she felt it was actually beneath her even to appear to notice the circumstance in the most distant manner, she observed, "How crowded the house is! It is always well filled: but to-night——"

"Perfectly insufferable!" remarked Lord Saxondale. "There will be a fine crush on going out presently: and that will be rare and amusing."

"Indeed, with your lordship's permission," said Florina, quietly, "we will wait till the crush is over ere we take our departure."

"Just as you like, Flo," responded Edmund, with a display of familiarity so flippant as to border upon impudence even on the part of an accepted suitor.

"Yes, I shall prefer it," said the young lady, the carnation deepening upon her cheeks.

"The house is indeed famously crowded," resumed her intended. "Won't she have a brilliant reception!" he exclaimed, in allusion to Signora Vivaldi, the new *danseuse* who was to make her first appearance there that evening. "My sisters will be mad to think they didn't come."

"And why are they not here to-night?" asked Florina. "It was remiss on my part not to inquire before."

"Oh! that's explained in a very few words," responded Edmund. "In the first place you must know that my lady mother abominates operas and all that kind of thing; and as she and I had a little tiff this morning, she was less in a humour than ever to come here to-night. Then Juliana was unwell—and so Constance stayed at home to keep them both company."

"I am sorry to hear that you had any words with Lady Saxondale," remarked Florina, in a serious and even reproachful tone.

"Why, it was all her fault," answered the young nobleman. "She will persist in treating me like a child; and I don't choose to stand it. So whenever she gives herself airs, I always let her know I am not tied to her apron-strings. In fact, I told her pretty plainly this morning that she must not take upon herself to lecture me any more, as I am resolved not to put up with it. But what made her particularly savage, was because I had occasion to remind her that the rank and the wealth were all on the male side of the family, and that she herself was originally nothing more than a poor country parson's daughter."

"You do not mean me to believe that you really spoke thus to your mother?" said Florina, looking up at her intended with mingled surprise and sorrow; for perhaps the poor girl thought that he who would treat a parent in such a manner, was not likely to be over particular how coarsely and cruelly he behaved towards a wife.

"Indeed but I did though," replied Edmund, with a malignant chuckle, as if it were something to congratulate himself upon; "and because old Mabel interfered I threatened to bundle her neck and crop out of the house. But, ah! whom do I see down there in the pit?"—and as he thus spoke he thrust his quizzing-glass into the socket of his eye, screwing up his face so as to retain it there without the necessity of holding it with his hand.

Florina mechanically glanced in the direction towards which Edmund's looks were bent; and as she at once recognised the individual who had attracted his notice, the colour deepened to a richer hue upon her cheeks. At the same instant she dropped her fan, which she hastily stooped to to pick up; and a very close observer—had there been one near—might have fancied that it was in the confusion of suddenly excited feelings she thus dropped the fan, or else did it purposely as a pretext for hiding her emotions.

"Well, I never knew that the steady and hard-working Mr. William Deveril was a frequenter of operas," continued Lord Saxondale. "Upon my word, teaching drawing and music must be very profitable things now-a-days, when they enable their professors to appear in handsome costume at Her Majesty's Theatre. By the by, Deveril has given you drawing-lessons—has he not?"

"He has," answered Florina, who, having taken her *bouquet* from the parapet of the box, was now bending over it apparently in deep contemplation of the flowers that composed the nosegay: but suddenly raising her head, she observed, "Since that new style of painting on ivory with fast colours was introduced from Italy a year or two ago, a great many young ladies have gone to school again so far as that beautiful art is concerned; and I have been among the number. That is to say, I have taken a few lessons from Mr. Deveril; and I believe your sisters are doing the same at the present time?"

"That's how I came to know the fellow," remarked Saxondale contemptuously. "But, by Jove! only look at his impudence! He has actually bowed to us."

The young aristocratic coxcomb turned round disdainfully, not choosing to notice the respectful salutation of a drawing-master; but Mr. Deveril was more than recompensed for the insolent youth's conduct, by the graceful acknowledgment of his bow which he received from Lady Florina Staunton.

"You don't mean to say that you noticed him?" exclaimed Saxondale.

"Why would you have me guilty of a most wanton and unnecessary piece of rudeness?" she asked, but again bending her head over the *bouquet* of flowers, and indeed unconsciously pulling one of them to pieces.

"Well, I think that you are a great deal too condescending," remarked her suitor.

Florina made no reply; and Lord Saxondale, almost immediately forgetting the incident, began talking on some other subject.

The Mr William Deveril, whose name has just been introduced into our pages, was quite a young man—very handsome—with a complexion that was either naturally dark, or else rendered so, by a long residence in a southern clime; for he had been much in Italy, whence he had brought with him to England that art which he now appeared to be teaching with very considerable success, and which indeed had become quite the rage amongst ladies in high life, especially as Queen Victoria herself was known to have expressed her approval of it and to have purchased some specimens of Mr. Deveril. We may add, in regard to his personal appearance, that he was tall and symmetrically formed, and looked far more like a nobleman—or what a nobleman ought to be—than the insolent lordling who had just now treated him with such insulting disdain.

Lord Harold Staunton was chatting glibly away with his sister's three young friends, and Lord Saxondale was passing his remarks upon the most prominent occupants, male or female, of the first tier-boxes, with his quizzing glass in his eye,—when the box-keeper entered, and presenting a card to Harold, said, "My lord, the gentleman who gave me this requests permission to pay his respects to your lordship and to Lady Florina Staunton. He desired me to add that he is the bearer of letters from the Marquis of Eagledean in Italy."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," observed Harold, reading the name upon the card. "We don't want to be bothered with visitors now——"

"Oh! but if this Mr. Gunthorpe be the bearer of letters from our uncle," Florina at once remarked, "it is our duty to see him; and moreover it should be a pleasure on our part to show him any attention."

"Well, just as you like," returned Harold: and he then bade the box-keeper introduce the gentleman.

"Gunthorpe? not a very aristocratic name!" said Lord Saxondale, the moment the box-keeper had retired. "I don't wonder, Flo, at your brother not wanting to see him to-night. I'll be bound to say he's some queer-looking old fellow—for an eccentric person, as your uncle the Marquis is reported to be, must need have eccentric acquaintances. I can picture to myself an elderly gentleman—either bald or else with an antiquated wig—brown most likely——"

At this moment the door of the box was again opened; and Mr. Gunthorpe was introduced. Now be it well understood that the veriest fool in the universe, when indulging in random prophecies and conjectures, must once in a way find his speculation borne out by facts: and so it was in the present instance. For of all comical figures, it would be difficult to conceive one more calculated to excite the ridicule of brainless or thoughtless young men than Mr. Gunthorpe. His age seemed to border upon sixty: he was short, stout, and wore one of the most remarkable brown scratch wigs that ever were seen. He had a red face, and a large double chin over-hanging his white cravat. His apparel was equally old-fashioned so far as the cut of the garments was concerned, though he appeared in a full evening suit of black, with white waistcoat: but the square tails of the coat, having pockets with overhanging flaps—the waistcoat reaching far down upon his stomach—the knee-breeches and the black silk stockings, all rendered the costume singular enough. There was an admixture of sharpness and good nature in his countenance: but a physiognomist would have noticed that the former expression could rise into sternness, while the latter could expand into the widest benevolence. On making his appearance he bowed with an off-hand sort of politeness, and threw a rapid but searching glance over the assembled group—his eyes however dwelling longer on Harold and Florina than on the rest. Lord Saxondale turned round to conceal his laughter—muttering almost audibly as he did so, "What a figure of fun for the Opera!"

Lord Harold merely bowed with a well-bred courtesy; but Lady Florina, rising from her chair, advanced a step or two, and said with a most affable sweetness, "Will you not sit down, Mr. Gunthorpe?"

"No, I thank your ladyship," he answered: "I am off again in a moment. The fact is I have been in Italy some time, and having had the honour of the Marquis of Eagledean's acquaintance—I may say friendship—he gave me letters of introduction to his relatives in England; and where I was just now seated in the pit, I observed somebody near me pointing out to another which was Lord Harold Staunton's box. So happening to have the letters about me, I thought I would step round and present them."

"Any friend of our uncle," said Florina, "is most welcome."

"To be sure, most welcome," echoed Lord Harold, but not seeming as if he thought so: indeed, from the very instant that he beheld Mr. Gunthorpe, he had conceived a prejudice against him.

"Here are the letters," said the old gentleman, producing a couple, and presenting one to Lord Harold and one to Lady Florina. "And here is one," he added, drawing forth a third from his immense pocket-book, which was literally plethoric with papers, "that I suppose I had better entrust to your ladyship, as it is for your aunt, Lady Macdonald."

"I will take care and give it to my aunt the moment I return home," said Florina, in the same courteous and affable manner as before.

"Where are you staying, Mr. Gunthorpe," asked Harold: "for I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you."

"I have put up at the *Bell and Crown*, Holborn," replied Mr. Gunthorpe.

Lord Harold Staunton became suddenly aghast—and Lord Saxondale laughed outright. Nothing could be more terrible to the exquisite aristocratic refinement of Lord Harold than being compelled to know a man who "put up," as he called it, at such a vulgar-out-of-the-way place as the *Bell and Crown*, Holborn! Lord Harold felt positively little: it seemed to him as if the whole house had

heard that ominous announcement of the *Bell and Crown*, Holborn; and the mischievous pleasure which young Saxondale evidently derived from the circumstance, only increased Lord Harold's vexation and confusion.

"Where did you say, my dear sir?" asked Saxondale with an impudent leer; "for I don't think her ladyship," alluding to Florina, "understood you."

"Indeed, but I did, perfectly well," said the amiable young lady, endeavouring to make up by an increased affability for the rudeness with which the old gentleman was being treated: "and I shall not forget the address, so as not only to remind my brother that he is to call upon you, Mr. Gunthorpe, but also that my aunt Lady Macdonald may write and ask you to come and dine with us."

"But where *is* Holborn?" asked Lord Saxondale. "At the West End here, we know nothing of those regions."

"I thank your ladyship for your kindness," said Mr. Gunthorpe, not taking the slightest notice of the impertinent young aristocrat, nor yet appearing the least abashed by the supercilious treatment he received. "I shall be delighted to form the acquaintance of Lady Macdonald:"—then turning towards Harold, he said, "When your lordship honours me with a call, perhaps it will be before twelve, as I have a great deal of business in the City, and shall be engaged there every day from noon till five."

"Before twelve?" echoed Lord Harold Staunton, again rendered quite aghast. "Mr. Gunthorpe, you must pardon me—but I—I— am not up, usually speaking, at that hour."

"Oh! well then, I must endeavour to make an arrangement more suited to your convenience," said the old gentleman. "But I will let you know."

He then bowed once more, and hastened away from the box.

"Well, wasn't I right?" exclaimed Saxondale. "Did you ever see such a figure of fun in all your life?"

"Your lordship should remember," said Florina, in a tone of firm rebuke, "that Mr. Gunthorpe is a friend of my uncle's. Besides, he is an old gentleman, and should be treated with respect. Look!" she added, handing Edmund the letter which was addressed to herself and over which she had just glanced her eyes. "You see what my uncle says."

Lord Saxondale took the letter, the laconic contents of which were as follows:—

"Naples, May 23rd, 1844.

"My dear niece,

"The bearer of this is my intimate friend Mr. Gunthorpe who for many years has been the most considerable English banker in Naples. He has now retired from business, and is returning to England. I know that you will show him every becoming attention.

"Your affectionate uncle,

"EAGLEDEAN."

"The letter addressed to me is as near as possible to the same effect," observed Lord Harold, reading over Saxondale's shoulder the one just quoted. "But really, to think that I can show any studied attentions to this Mr. Gunthorpe——"

His words were interrupted by a sudden burst of applause which shook the entire house; and all eyes were in a moment directed to the stage on which the *debutante* had just made her appearance. She was a heavenly creature, of sylphid form, airy lightness, and exquisite grace; and her beauty was of the most ravishing description. But it is not our intention to prolong this chapter by a description of Signora Vivaldi; inasmuch as we shall shortly have to introduce her more particularly to our readers, and shall then do ample justice to her rare attractions. For the present it will be sufficient to observe that her *debut* was eminently successful, and that her dancing was the most finished illustration of "the poetry of motion" ever exhibited upon the stage.

When the performance was over, the brilliant assembly began to melt away: and during half-an-hour the Haymarket and Pall Mall resounded with the cries of men summoning the different carriages. Hundreds of the proudest names of the British Aristocracy were thus vociferated forth in rapid succession; while the roll of wheels, the trampling of horses, the crashing of steps let up and down, and the banging of carriage-doors likewise mingled their sounds in one tremendous din. But at length the throng of equipages with their prancing steeds and glaring lights, dispersed in all directions; and amongst the last that thus rolled away, was that which bore Lord Harold Staunton's party from the doors of the Opera.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NOBLE INTIMATES.

On the following Monday, at about noon, Lord Harold Staunton's valet knocked gently at the door of his master's bedroom; and in meek reply to the demand, "Who the deuce is that?" ventured to intimate that it was ten minutes past twelve o'clock. Thereupon Lord Harold bade his domestic enter; and sitting up in bed, he yawned fearfully, observing, "'Pon my soul, it doesn't seem as if I had slept an hour! Are you sure it is so late, Alfred?"

"Quite sure, my lord," was the answer given by the valet, who was a man of about thirty,—bustling, active, and yet doing his business in that easy and quiet way which showed his experience in the position which he filled.

"Any letters, Alfred?" asked Lord Harold.

The valet produced several; and the young nobleman, still sitting up in bed, began to open them one after another with the aristocratic languor which was partly affected and partly arising from the influence of late hours.

"These letters," he observed, musing audibly, "may be divided into two distinct classes—the invitations and the dunning ones; and I am not sure but that the last predominate. It seems, Alfred, that some of my tradesmen are getting rather pressing and impertinent."

"They certainly do not know how to behave themselves, my lord," returned the valet, as he arranged his noble master's shaving apparatus, hair-brushes, oils, pomatums, scents, and other requisites upon the toilet-table.

"Don't you think, Alfred, that my old uncle the Marquis ought to be ashamed of himself?" said Lord Harold, throwing himself lazily back again upon the pillow. "Was there ever such a thing heard of before, as a nobleman with some

thirty thousand a-year allowing his nephew, who is also his heir, a wretched, paltry, miserable eight hundred? If it weren't for my worthy old aunt Lady Macdonald, who draws her purse strings as freely as she can, I don't know how the devil I should manage. But after all, to have an income of about twelve hundred a-year altogether, and yet spend five thousand, is a state of affairs which must necessarily have its troubles."

"To be sure, my lord," observed the valet: "and these creditors are getting very troublesome. Of course I say all I possibly can to them, representing that your lordship is in daily expectation of considerable funds from the Marquis of Eagledean, and that the moment the money arrives they will all be paid."

"And yet you see, Alfred, that they are very far from being satisfied," rejoined Lord Harold.

"They are most unreasonable, my lord."

"They are indeed: or else they would not be pestering me with these abominable dunning letters. I wish to heaven I was in the House of Peers! I would bring in a bill to make it felony for a tradesman to write a dunning letter to a nobleman. But when my old uncle dies, and when I *do* succeed to the peerage, the very first thing I will propose is something of that sort."

"Your lordship will be pursuing a very wise course," said the valet. "The impudence of tradesmen is now-a-days astonishing."

"I wish I could throw these vagabonds of creditors overboard, as young Lord Cecil Stafford has done," observed Harold. "He went through the Insolvent's Court the other day with flying colours, to the tune of sixty thousand; and though he was opposed by twenty creditors in person and nine barristers retained specially, the Commissioner took his part and discharged him at once."

"The Commissioner behaved admirably, my lord," said the valet.

"Yes—most admirably: and the very next day Lord Cecil, to show his gratitude, went in a four-in-hand to thank him personally for his politeness. The Commissioner was no doubt glad to see him in such good form within four-and-twenty hours of leaving the Queen's Bench."

"It must have been a very gratifying sight, my lord, to the Commissioner," remarked the valet.

"Very indeed:"—and with these words the young nobleman emerged from his couch.

Having performed his toilet so far as the process of shaving, ablutions, and hair-anointing went, he put on his morning *deshabillée*, consisting of an immense pair of trousers of a kind of shawl pattern, red morocco slippers, and a dressing gown of the costliest figured silk, with a gold cord confining it at the waist; and thus airily apparelled, like a Turkish Pasha, he passed into his sitting-room where breakfast was spread upon a table. And a most inviting repast it was—consisting of everything to tempt the appetite in the shape of coffee and chocolate, ham and tongue, cold chickens, raised French pies, new-laid eggs, hot rolls, and the freshest water-cresses gathered by some poor girl who had risen for the purpose at that hour when Lord Harold himself was just seeking his couch. Having, in his own words, "just picked a little bit," the young nobleman took up the newspaper and read the account of Signora Vivaldi's splendid triumph on the Saturday night previous: and scarcely had he finished the perusal when Lord Saxondale was announced.

Be it understood that although the preceding day was the Sabbath, yet the two young aristocrats having dined together, had adjourned to some place of dissipated resort, where they supped and drank deeply of champagne, so that it was not till daylight that they sought repose. Lord Harold, being three or four years older than his companion and of much stronger constitution, could better sustain the effects of a debauch; and indeed, after a few hours' sleep, he scarcely felt them, much less bore their marks upon his countenance: whereas young Saxondale, being still little better than a mere boy and by no means of vigorous health, was invariably punished by his sensations in the morning for the previous night's follies. Accordingly, as he now made his appearance, the bluish circles about his eyes, the redness of the eyes themselves, his parched lips, and pale cheeks, sufficiently indicated all that he felt.

"I am regular out of sorts this morning," he said flinging himself upon a chair. "A thundering headache, such a tightness across the forehead, and a horrible sickness of the stomach! Look how my hand shakes too."

"Take a bottle of soda-water with some brandy," suggested Lord Harold.

The invitation was accepted—the bell was rung—the soda-water and brandy brought up and disposed of—and now the hectic flush produced by fresh stimulation appeared upon Saxondale's cheeks.

"The papers speak splendidly of the Signora's success on Saturday night," said Lord Harold. "What a magnificent creature she is!"

"I would give the world to know her," returned Lord Saxondale. "And to tell you the truth, I should have laid in bed all day to nurse myself, if it hadn't been that I wanted to speak to you upon this subject."

"Well, go on," said Harold. "Tell me what you want."

"Oh! deuce take it," said Saxondale pettishly, "you know very well what I want!—to get introduced somehow or another to Signora Vivaldi; and as you can always manage this sort of thing, I want you to do it in the present instance."

"And what would Florina say," asked Harold, "if she knew that her brother was helping her intended husband to an acquaintance with a beautiful dancer?"

"In the first place, Florina need know nothing at all about it," replied Edmund; "and in the second place, it's no reason because I am engaged to be married to your sister when I am twenty-one, that I am to remain an anchorite in the meantime."

"I was only joking, Saxondale," exclaimed Harold. "But seriously speaking we must really get acquainted with this delightful creature. The newspaper of this morning says that though she has been nearly all her life in Italy, she is not an Italian by birth; and it ventures to hint that she is of English parentage. It's quite true that she has little of the Italian about her, except the graces of the daughters of the sunny south; for as to her beauty, there is nothing Italian in that brilliancy of complexion which puts even the fairest skins of our English girls to shame."

"Oh! but there are fair Italian women as well as dark ones," observed Saxondale. "I have read as in a book. But whether Italian or English, this Signora Vivaldi is the most enchanting creature I ever saw in all my life—Lady Florina of course excepted. And now, is it possible to get introduced to her?"

"You heard what we were told behind the scenes at the Opera last night," said Lord Harold; "that the Signora is the most discreet and virtuous of young ladies—that she is attended by an old duenna who looks as sour as vinegar, and screws up her face most awfully if even an eye be too intently fixed upon her fair charge—and that when at rehearsal the Signora keeps herself as aloof as circumstances can possibly admit, from both the male and female performers in the ballet. Why, it seems to be even a secret known only to the lessee and the ballet-master where she lives; and neither of them is at all likely to give the information."

"Oh! but her residence is easily found out," exclaimed Edmund. "When leaving the Opera, she must of a necessity ride home in a carriage, hackney-coach, or some kind of vehicle; and it will be easy enough to get a person to follow it."

"Granted!" said Lord Harold. "But when you *have* found out her place of abode, what course would you adopt? I do not think that from all we heard last night she would give us a very gracious reception if we went boldly to call upon her. Yet there *are* ways and means: and these must be thought of. In the first place I will instruct Alfred to endeavour to follow her from the theatre the next time she makes her appearance. Alfred is a cunning, astute fellow, with all his sedateness of look and mealy-mouthiness of words; and he will be sure to discover the fair one's abode. This once done we can deliberate how to proceed."

"I was thinking," remarked Saxondale, "whether if you were to draw me up some appropriate little billet, I might not send it to her. By addressing it to the Opera it would be sure to reach her——"

"And be treated with contempt," added Staunton. "Yes—but who ever believed in the virtue of an actress or a dancing girl?" exclaimed Saxondale, contemptuously.

"All rules have an exception; and in this case our phœnix of beauty and mystery seems to constitute that exception. However I will do the best I can for you in the matter; and as a preliminary, will set Alfred to discover her residence. We will then take measures accordingly. But now, my dear fellow, I want you to do me a little favour in your turn."

"Anything but in the money way," replied Saxondale: "for I am as hard up to-day as you can possibly be. Just before I came out I told my mother that I had nothing left at the banker's, and desired her to ask my guardians for some cash: but she positively refused. So I gave her my mind, and came off in high dudgeon. Now, as for applying direct to my guardians, it's out of the question; I should only get a good blowing up; and I can't talk to them in the same free and easy style as I do to my mother. They won't stand it."

"Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow—are they not?" inquired Harold.

"Yes; those are my blessed guardians," rejoined Saxondale: "and what with the surly old peer and the business-like lawyer, I have to deal with two confounded impracticable fellows. The last time I applied to them they told me I had a splendid allowance for a young nobleman under age, and must make it do: but one's guardians always seem to think that an income which will barely supply shoe-leather is uncommon liberal."

"This is very awkward," said Lord Harold, both looking and feeling vexed: "for I am in rather a mess at present — several creditors bothering me — and must get two or three thousand or so by some means or another. I shouldn't have thought of asking you, my dear Edmund, considering that I am already your debtor to the amount of a cool five thousand ——"

"Oh, that be hanged!" ejaculated Saxondale. "You know if I had the money you should not be in want of it for another minute. But surely there must be some way of raising the wind?"

"Of course," answered Lord Harold. "There are money-brokers, and bill-brokers, and discounters, and usurers enough in the City: but the deuce of it is that I am afraid my introduction wouldn't exactly do—I am in rather deep with them myself."

"An idea strikes me!" ejaculated the youthful heir of Saxondale, his ignoble countenance suddenly brightening up. "That old fellow Gunthorpe——"

"Ah, to be sure!" cried Lord Harold, catching at the hint: "he might be made useful. Let me see—my uncle's letter says that Mr. Gunthorpe was for many years the most eminent banker in Italy, and now he is retired from business. Depend upon it he's as rich as Crœsus; and if we can only get on the blind side of him——But that's difficult though, a banker and a sharp old fellow into the bargain! However, there is nothing like trying. So here goes."

With these words, Lord Harold jumped up, fetched his writing-desk from a side-table, sat down, and penned the following lines upon the best cream-laid paper:—

"Jermyn Street,
"Monday, Noon.

"My dear Mr. Gunthorpe,

"I had not an opportunity on Saturday evening of saying all the civil things I ought and meant; but perhaps you will do me the honour of dining with me to-morrow at half-past six? We shall be quite alone, with the exception of my very particular friend Lord Saxondale.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe,
"Your's very faithfully,
"HAROLD STAUNTON."

"Now what do you think of that?" asked his lordship, as he handed the letter to young Saxondale for his perusal.

"Nothing can be better," was the response. "You must give the old boy a capital dinner and plenty of wine; for he looks as if he loved good cheer and could take his glass: and then, when we have once got him nicely warmed over the bottle, we will see whether we can't manage to draw him of a few thousands."

"On our joint security," added Staunton. "It will be capital! I really do begin to think we are pretty certain to succeed. These trading money-

making people are always ready to worship a lord; and it's clear that old Gunthorpe wants to get into good society by bringing those letters of introduction. But how on earth he could have taken up his abode at such an outrageous place as the *Bell and Crown* is difficult to conceive. However, we will not trouble ourselves on that score, but will despatch the letter at once."

This was accordingly done; and Lord Harold then returned to his bed-chamber to dress himself, while young Saxondale yawned over the newspaper. When the toilet of the former was accomplished, they strolled out and repaired to the billiard-rooms, where they played for about an hour. But at length Saxondale, flinging down the cue, declared his hand shook so he could not make another stroke; and though he took two or three glasses of neat brandy to steady it, the alcohol produced not the desired effect, and so the game was abandoned. They then proceeded to the stables belonging to Saxondale Mansion, and mounting a couple of horses, went for a ride in the Park, attended by a groom. Having ridden twice round, they dismounted, left their horses with the groom, and entered the enclosure to have a chat with the pretty nursemaids who were attending upon the children playing about; and in this way another hour was spent. They then returned to their horses and rode down to Tattersall's, where they looked in, "just to see what was going on;" and afterwards proceeded to a Club in St. James's Street, where they posted themselves at the bow-window to ogle the women who passed by. This brought on six o'clock; and then they deliberated for half-an-hour where they should dine. Staunton suggested a Bond Street hotel; but Saxondale declared with a more affected crack in his voice than ever, that the turtle was not good there, and accordingly proposed another place; to which Staunton had a similar objection in respect to the venison of this establishment

They had almost decided upon a third when they recollected that the ice-punch was by no means of good quality the last time they were there; and the name of a fourth hotel was likewise black-balled on the score that there was never enough of cayenne in the soup. A fifth hotel was discussed for ten minutes, but also eschewed, not through any fault in the culinary department, but because the proprietor had attended to oppose Lord Cecil Stafford when he went through the Court; and a sixth was discarded because the head-waiter had such very bad teeth. Ultimately these two aristocratic coxcombs decided upon their dining-place; and thither did they repair.

The important process of dinner engaged them up till nearly ten o'clock; and then they issued forth to smoke their cigars in the Quadrant, and look at the women parading there. Lord Harold was perfectly sober; but his friend admitted to him, with the mysterious confidence of inebriation, that he was already "more than half-seas over." Having taken a few strolls up and down the Quadrant,—the arcade of which was not then cleared away,—they agreed upon adjourning to some place of amusement; and after due deliberation, decided upon the gaming table. They accordingly turned out of the Quadrant into one of the diverging streets, and stopped at a door over which a brilliant gas-lamp was burning. Here they knocked and rung, and the door was instantaneously opened by a porter who was always on the alert within. They entered—and the door was immediately closed again. Nodding familiarly to the porter, who evidently knew them well, they proceeded along the passage to a second door, which even the most superficial observer might perceive to be of extraordinary strength and solidity: indeed, it was plated all over with iron. A small wicket, about a foot square was opened in this door, and a man's countenance peered through for a moment; but recognising the two noblemen, this second porter, to whom that countenance belonged, closed the wicket and proceeded to open the door itself. Heavy bolts were heard to draw back and chains to fall, thus evincing no ordinary precautions on the part of the proprietors of the gambling-house to barricade themselves against the incursions of the police.

Passing on, and again nodding familiarly to the official, Harold and Edmund ascended a carpeted staircase, and reached a handsomely furnished room, of spacious dimensions, with the gaming-table in the middle and a well-spread sideboard at the extremity. This sideboard was covered with refreshments, including the choicest descriptions of French wines. The table in the centre, unlike the old-fashioned *rouge-et-noir* tables, was square—or rather oblong—covered with green baize, and having billiard-pockets at the four corners and on each side. It was also contrived in such a manner that all around there were moveable borders, or ledges, which might be raised so as to form the cushions of a regular billiard-table; but as these borders were now let down flat, by means of their hinges, the table presented an unbroken surface.

The croupiers, or managers of the gaming-table, were seated in their proper places, with their rakes in their hands, and green shades over their eyes to screen them from the exceeding vividness of the light thrown by the gas-lamps suspended above the board. The bank, or stock of money, was contained in a large cash-box placed on the table before the senior croupier. But on the right hand of this individual was a very extraordinary-looking piece of mechanism, standing upon a pedestal. This instrument had the appearance of a coffee-grinder, with the bowl to receive whatever was to be ground, and the handle to work the grinding machinery: but instead of having any visible opening for the ground material to run out of, that part of the mill where this opening ought to be was fixed in the pedestal.

To complete the description of the several features which the interior of this room presented to the view, we must add that there were three or four bells hanging against the wall, having wires of communication with the various parts of the house, even up to the very roof, in order that those who were on the watch above, below, and outside in the back part of the premises, might be enabled to give timely warning at the first appearance of anything like alarm.

There were upwards of a dozen persons around the table, occupied in playing, when Lord Harold and Edmund entered the room. Some of these individuals were sitting as quiet and composedly as if engaged in the most matter-of-fact proceeding: others were standing—and these were the feverish and excited players. But of those who were seated, two or three were mere "decoys"—that is to say, persons actually hired by the proprietor of the place not only for the purpose of always keeping the game going, but likewise of encouraging the unwary and inexperienced to stake their money. This being what is termed "a fashionable hell," only a certain class of individuals were admitted; namely, those who were known to belong to the wealthy circles: and thus, so far as apparel and outward appearances went, the company were in that sense "respectable" enough. But if their characters came to be closely scrutinized and deeply probed, the investigation would doubtless have afforded an additional proof to the thousand and one already existing, that the villany and profligacy which broadcloth and fine linen cover, are far greater than the vice and depravity which lurk beneath fustian or downright rags.

Neither Lord Harold Staunton nor Lord Saxondale had much money in their pockets at the time to play with: but still they had a few five-pound notes and sovereigns between them; and these they ventured upon the chances of the game. They had been thus occupied for about half-an-hour, and had lost the greater portion of what they had put down, when one of the bells suddenly rang furiously.

"Top of the house!" ejaculated one of the croupiers, distinguishing at a glance which bell it was that rung, and therefore from which quarter the alarm proceeded.

Confusion and dismay seized upon the two young noblemen and the five or six least experienced individuals present: but the older hands, including the croupiers and the decoys, showed no bewilderment nor excitement at all; and though their actions were prompt, yet what they did do was done with calmness and self-possession. One of the croupiers took out all the bank-notes and gold from the cash-box, which he placed upon a shelf, securing the money about his person.

The other croupier and the decoys threw the tops of the rakes (which were immediately broken off), together with the ivory counters, the dice, and the dice-boxes, into the coffee-mill, where half a dozen turns of the handle served to grind all those objects if not actually to powder, at all events into morsels too small to answer the purposes of evidence before a magistrate. The borders or ledges of the table were put up – cues and balls were simultaneously produced—and by the time the police broke in, which they did in a very few minutes, the aspect of the scene was altogether changed. Not the slightest trace of an ordinary gaming-table was there—merely a billiard-table at which several gentlemen seemed to be playing a quiet comfortable game, when the door was flung violently open and an inspector with half a dozen constables made their appearance.

"Ah! you have been too quick for us, eh?" ejaculated the inspector, with a glance embracing the aspect of things, and perfectly well aware of all that had been done. "However," he added, "we will see if we can't bring it home to you. Keep the door, lads!"

"What do you mean by coming into a respectable house like this?" demanded the head croupier, assuming the indignant.

"Come, Mr. Jameson, none of your nonsense," said the inspector. "You know very well that I am acquainted with you and up to all your dodges. Respectable house indeed! Very respectable, when it's so barricaded down below that we are obliged to force our way in by the attics; and even *there* you have got a man posted on the look-out. I suppose you will have an electric telegraph laid on next?"

"Thank you for the hint," said the principal croupier, bursting out laughing; and he winked knowingly to his comrades.

"Now let us look at this machine," continued the inspector, advancing up to the coffee-mill.

But the pedestal stood so firm that it semed to resist all his attempts to move it. He however retreated a pace or two, and applying his foot with a backward kick, broke it clean off on a level with the floor; so that what had appeared to be a pedestal, was in reality nothing more than a hollow tube, or pipe, which passed completely through the flooring and down which the crushed objects went.

"Where does your coffee go when you have ground it?" asked the inspector, ironically.

"All the way down into the sewers, for the benefit of the poor devils who search those places," coolly answered the croupier. "If you want a sample of the coffee, you will have to go down into the sewer to get it; and then there's the chance of it's having been all washed away."

"Well, I shall take this with me," said the inspector, lifting up the mill and the piece of the tube on the top of which it was fixed; "and I shall take all you along with me likewise."

"What does the fellow mean?" cried Saxondale. "Take us with him! What *me*, Lord——"

"Hush—nonsense!" exclaimed Harold: "you are Mr. Jenkins, and I am Mr. Tomkins. So now away to the station-house! We will send and get bail in half-an-hour."

"Oh! if that's all, it will be a capital lark," cried Saxondale; "and to-morrow when we give our names as Jenkins and Tomkins, we shall puzzle the magistrate a bit."

To be brief, the whole party were marched off to the station-house, which was close at hand; and there the two young noblemen waited while they sent for persons to bail them. Four of Lord Saxondale's tradesmen were speedily found for the purpose: and soon after midnight the liberated aristocrats were strolling arm-in-arm down to Covent Garden to pass an hour at a "free-and-easy" nightly held by an hotel-keeper in that neighbourhood. It was two in the morning when Edmund, most particularly drunk, was helped out of a cab at the door of Saxondale mansion—helped into the house by the hall-porter—helped up to his chamber by a footman—and then helped into bed by his own valet.

On the following morning he awoke with a more awful head-ache than ever, and though he could scarcely drag himself from his couch, was nevertheless compelled to repair to the Marlborough Street Police-office in discharge of his bail. When the case was called on, the magistrate expressed an opinion that he could do nothing, as no evidence was produced to show that the house was one for gaming, much less that the prisoners were illegally gambling at the time of their arrest. They were all therefore discharged: and our two young noblemen quitted the office arm-in-arm, laughing heartily at the adventure.

Lord Harold now informed his friend that he had received a note from Mr. Gunthorpe accepting the invitation; whereupon Edmund declared that he should go home and lie down for two or three hours for the purpose of "getting all right," so as to enjoy himself in the evening. They accordingly separated for the present, Lord Harold proceeding to Jermyn Street, and Lord Saxondale to Park Lane.

But on arriving at the mansion, the latter was informed, when about to ascend to his bed-chamber, that his mother desired to speak with him upon a very important subject. His first impulse was to send a message to her ladyship to the effect that he would see her in the course of the day: but on second thoughts he fancied it better to adopt a more conciliatory policy, in case the Gunthorpe project might fail and he should find himself compelled to have recourse to her ladyship after all for the replenishment of his purse. He accordingly proceeded to the drawing-room where she was seated.

CHAPTER VII.

DOMESTIC SCENES IN HIGH LIFE.

LADY SAXONDALE was now forty years of age, and was perhaps one of the most splendidly handsome women belonging to the aristocracy of this country. Her's was a style of beauty which although so precocious in the spring-time of its youthful developments, was that which preserves the best; and without having expanded into corpulency or stoutness, her form had acquired just a sufficiency of *embonpoint* to set off that matronly stateliness which so well became her. Thus her fine figure, still preserving the proper symmetry of proportions, was not luxuriant so as to destroy its grace, nor of contours too full to be compatible with elegance; while it gave her all that majesty of demeanour and queenly dignity of look which

so admirably suited the haughty cast of her aquiline countenance. The pearly whiteness of the teeth remained in all its earliest perfection—the fires of youth still seemed flashing in her large dark eyes—and no streak of silver marred the raven blackness of her shining hair.

Her ladyship was clad in a dark dress trimmed with the richest lace. The room in which she was seated was spacious, lofty, and splendidly furnished. The heavy crimson draperies at the windows subdued the powerful lustre of the sultry sun; and vases of flowers gave a freshness to the hot and languid atmosphere of that summer-day's noon. To the walls were suspended several fine pictures; and all objects in the apartment were reproduced in the splendid mirrors that appeared on every side.

When Edmund entered the room he found his mother seated in an arm-chair near the centre table; and the grave severity of her look, as well as the drawn-up stateliness of her demeanour, at once convinced him that he was about to have what he termed "a scene."

But, for the reasons specified at the conclusion of the previous chapter, he resolved to adopt a conciliatory policy, if it were practicable; and therefore he somewhat mitigated the air of insolent defiance with which he had lately been wont to meet the maternal remonstrances or reproaches. Still his temper was on the point of failing him when he beheld the deep severity of his mother's looks—a severity not altogether unmingled with an expression of loathing and disgust, as her scrutinizing regards embraced at a glance all the evidences which his appearance furnished of the previous night's debauchery.

"Sit down, Edmund," said her ladyship; "for I wish to speak to you upon some matters of importance."

"Well, my dear lady-mother," answered the youth, sinking languidly down upon a sofa, "let us hear what you have got to say, and you shall find me the most attentive of listeners."

"Be so good as to divest yourself of this most unbecoming flippancy of manner," proceeded Lady Saxondale, fixing her eagle eyes almost sternly upon the youth, "for it amounts to an impertinence which I do not choose to tolerate."

"Now, upon my soul, this is too bad!" cried Saxondale, his affected voice thrilling into a positive screech. "I made my appearance with the most dutiful demeanour that I could command for the occasion: so if there's to be any quarrel, it will be of your picking."

"Quarrel, sir! how dare you make use of this language to me?"

"Come, mother, don't put yourself into a passion——"

"Silence!—and listen to me. You have lately been pursuing a career of the most degrading and revolting debauchery——"

"You have told me this over and over again, if that's all you wanted me for."

"Again I enjoin you to silence," interrupted Lady Saxondale fiercely, "for remember, you are not yet your own master—and during the year and ten months which have yet to elapse ere you attain your majority, your guardians and myself are determined to do our duty in the endeavour to reclaim you from these vicious courses which you are pursuing. Now, Edmund," she continued, in a somewhat milder tone, "I have besought—I have entreated—I have implored——I have likewise scolded, threatened, and menaced——but all to no purpose. With the deepest affliction do I behold you daily plunging more profoundly into the vortex of dissipation—constantly absent from home—remaining out late at nights—spending your money heaven only knows how—and, I fear, frequenting the worst society."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Edmund, sharply. "Lord Harold Staunton is my constant companion: and he is the brother of the young lady whom you yourself selected as my future wife."

"Florina is an amiable, excellent, and well-principled girl," said Lady Saxondale; "but I regret to add that her brother is very different. She herself knows not—nor is it proper that she should learn, the extent of the dissipations into which he plunges. She thinks him rather too gay, wild, and extravagant; but she does not suspect that he is a confirmed gambler, a reckless spendthrift, and an inveterate debauchee. Nor at the time when it was arranged that you should become her suitor, was I myself aware of the profligacy of his character: or else perhaps I might have hesitated to initiate and sanction an engagement which thus threw you into such evil companionship. But it is now too late to retract from that engagement——"

"Besides which it would be rather difficult to do so without my consent," interjected the youthful lord, flippantly. "I am deuced fond of the girl, and am quite willing to marry her to-morrow if you choose, instead of waiting for my majority."

"No, sir," interrupted Lady Saxondale sternly. "I have on a former occasion stated to you that by an addition to your father's will—an addition that was made within the month following your birth—it was chronicled as his solemn wish that you should not marry until you had obtained your majority, but that you should *then* enter the wedded state as early as might be convenient."

"No doubt my father had a very high opinion of the wedded state," observed Edmund, piqued by his mother's tone and manner, "since he himself twice entered it. But pray continue your observations: for to tell you the truth, I have got a thundering head-ache and want to go and lie down."

"Unhappy boy! you are adopting a suicidal course, by these profligacies and dissipations," cried Lady Saxondale. "But beware! Tractable and obedient as Florina is to the will of her aunt, yet if her delicacy be shocked by a discovery of the full extent of your vices, she may assert her right to have her own happiness considered, and thus withdraw from the engagement."

"No—I don't think it at all likely," rejoined the young man superciliously. "In the first place I know she is desperately fond of me: and in the second place, it is too good a match for her, poor and portionless as she is, to break off."

"I hope that your opinions are indeed well founded," said Lady Saxondale. "But I will now come to the point and explain to you the purport for which I desired this interview. Your guardians, Lord Petersfield and Mr. Malton, paid me a visit yesterday; and we had a long and serious conversation together. They positively insist that I withdraw you for a time from the temptations of a London life; and I therefore propose that we repair to Saxondale Castle to

pass some time—perhaps the whole interval until your majority. Lady Macdonald and Florina will be our visitors there, so that you may enjoy the company of your intended bride."

"What! go and bury myself in that out-of-the-way place!" exclaimed Edmund starting up from the sofa. "No—I'll be hanged if I do!"

"In that case," responded Lady Saxondale, endeavouring to maintain her dignified calmness, but all the evidences of her ill-suppressed indignation betraying themselves in her flushing cheeks, her fire-darting eyes, and her quivering lips—"in *that* case," she repeated, with strong accentuation, "it is Lord Petersfield's resolve to obtain for you the post of Attaché to some distant and petty embassy, so as to remove you from London."

"And what if I refuse to go—eh? what then?" demanded the young lord, with mingled insolence and malignity.

"Then, as it is in her Majesty's service," replied Lady Saxondale, "you will be *ordered* abroad, and at your peril will you refuse."

"Well, we shall see," was Edmund's dogged answer.

"Ah! but this is not all! Your guardians will stop your allowance," continued Lady Saxondale, her lips now ashy with the pent-up rage that filled her bosom.

"Well then, I must raise money with the bill-brokers in the City," rejoined Edmund.

"Wicked and preverse boy!" cried Lady Saxondale, now no longer able to repress her wrath; and starting up from her chair, she stamped her foot violently upon the carpet; "do you mean to defy me altogether?"

"I told you at the beginning that if there was a quarrel, it would be of your provoking!"

"Quarrel, sir!—a mother cannot quarrel with her son. She orders—and he obeys."

"The deuce he does! I think rather differently," exclaimed Edmund, with a taunting laugh.

"Vile and detestable disposition that you possess!" exclaimed the lady, whose haughty beauty now looked terrible in her anger. "If you only knew how much I suffered on your account when you were an infant—if you only knew how much I have done for you——But, no: you are incapable of appreciating it!"

"Oh! this is the old story over again," interrupted Edmund, with so heartless a flippancy that his words and his manner were but too well calculated to plant daggers in the bosom of Lady Saxondale. "Because I was lost or stolen when an infant, and you discovered me again, you are always flinging it in my teeth."

"Edmund! Edmund! do for heaven's sake treat me with more kindness, more respect!" said the unhappy lady now bursting into tears. "Oh! again I tell you that if you only knew all I have suffered on your account, you would not treat me thus! Consider!—reflect! your behaviour is most unnatural—most ungrateful——"

"Then why can't you leave me alone?" demanded the young man, entirely unmoved by the spectacle of that proud and haughty woman thus melting into the humiliation of tears and entreaties in his presence and through his conduct.

"Ah! I see that you are indeed heartless, thoroughly heartless!" she exclaimed, suddenly drawing her handkerchief across her eyes and in a moment recovering the stern stateliness of her demeanour. "Never again will I appeal to you, Edmund, for kindness and respect!—never again will I seek to touch your sympathies! Preverse boy, instead of imploring or entreating, I will act and command."

"Well then, I suppose it's a war to the knife," he observed with flippant disdain; "and we shall see who will get the better of it."

Thus speaking he gave another taunting laugh and lounged out of the room. The moment the door closed behind him, a terrible change came over Lady Saxondale; her entire appearance altered — her countenance became positively ghastly—her lips ashy white — and her whole frame convulsed with the inward working of the fiercest passions.

"Viper, that I have cherished in my bosom to sting me!" she said aloud: and the words came hissing from between her parched lips. "I hate him—yes, I hate him!"

But then she stopped short and glanced with a sudden start of uneasiness towards a door at the extremity of the apartment: for it struck her that a sound, resembling a cry of dismay, penetrating thence, had been wafted to her ear. Instantaneously recovering all her self-possession she approached that door—opened it abruptly—and beheld her two daughters quite near enough and in an attitude to show they had been listening.

That inner room was one where the young ladies were not wont to sit at this period of the day; and therefore it had never occurred to Lady Saxondale throughout the preceding interview with her son, that Juliana and Constance were by any probability so near. She fancied that they were in a more distant apartment, occupied with their music, drawing, or embroidery; and consequently their presence in that room, as well as the indications above mentioned, naturally struck her with the suspicion that they had penetrated thither on purpose to listen to what was taking place between Edmund and herself. We may add that Juliana, the eldest, was a perfect likeness of her mother — with the same haughty aquiline profile, hair of the same raven glossiness, eyes of the same dark splendour, a complexion of the same clear delicate skin, and a figure modelled with a like voluptuous symmetry of proportions. Constance, the younger, though possessing the same Hebe-proportions of shape, was in all other respects of a different style of beauty, having light hair, a complexion of dazzling transparency, and blue eyes; while the outline of her features was more delicate and more strictly classical, with nothing of that haughtiness of expression which characterized both her mother and her sister.

"What means this?" demanded Lady Saxondale sternly. "Is it not sufficient that I should possess an undutiful and rebellious son? but am I also doomed to find that my daughters are playing the part of spies upon their mother's actions?"

"Spies!" echoed Juliana, the elder, her delicate brunette complexion suffusing with the glow of indignation at the charge.

"Oh! do not be angry with us, dear mother," cried Constance, the younger, bursting into tears.

The difference of the manner in which the two young ladies received their mother's reproach, must at a glance afford the reader an accurate insight into their respective dispositions—showing

that wheras the former was characterized by the proud and haughty spirit of Lady Saxondale, the latter was all gentleness, meekness, and affectionate submission.

"Explain this conduct on your part," said the indignant mother: and though her two daughters were tall, yet her own stature was elevated above them to the majestic height of Diana the Huntress.

"It is somewhat too hard," returned Juliana, almost in a tone of defiance, "to be taunted with having wilfully played the part of spies, when it was really all the result of accident;" and having thus spoken, the Hon. Miss Farefield walked towards the window.

"Constance," said Lady Saxondale, addressing her younger daughter in a milder tone than she had previously used; "*you* will at least give your mother a satisfactory and respectful answer."

"It is as Juliana has said," replied Constance—"the result of accident. Tired of our music and drawing, we each resolved to commence a piece of tambour-work, and thought of copying two of the pictures in this room. So we came hither with our frames, which are there,"—and with her white hand she pointed in the direction to which her sweet blue eyes also glanced. "But scarcely had we entered—not five minutes ago—when we were startled by hearing high words in the next room; and recognizing Edmund's voice, we instinctively approached the door to listen. The action was so quick on our part, that I did not pause for a moment to reflect that it might be wrong; and I am sure it was the same with Juliana."

"And what did you hear?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Come, speak, Miss! — tell me what you heard?" she added more sternly, seeing that her daughter hesitated and looked frightened.

"Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed Constance, bursting into tears: "I heard you beseech and implore Edmund to treat you with kindness and respect——and it cut me to the quick to think that you should have thus to speak to my brother?"

"Ah! then you were ear-witnesses, young ladies, of your mother's deep humiliation—her utter degradation?" — and as Lady Saxondale spoke with accents of bitterness and implacability, her countenance grew pale with the fierce feelings that raged within her bosom, and her fine majestic form trembled from head to foot.

"Dear mother, is it something so terrible—something so unpardonable, that we have done?"—and Constance turned aside to weep more bitterly than before.

"Juliana!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale; "come hither—approach me, I say! Wherefore do you thus stand aside and lounge listlessly in that window-recess, as if you were indifferent to what is passing?"

"Because I think that your ladyship," answered the Hon. Miss Farefield, "is treating us with unnecessary harshness for a very venial offence—if an offence it be at all;" but as she spoke she advanced towards her mother, of whom she still stood in just sufficient awe not to dare defy her altogether.

"There can fall upon a mother's head no curse more withering than that of having disobedient children," said Lady Saxondale in a strange deep voice. "You, Constance," she continued, placing her hand caressingly upon the shoulder of her fair-haired younger daughter, "are penitent for this transgression on your part; and you at least treat me with respect. But you, Juliana," she added, turning towards the dark-haired elder girl, "are inclined to display that same rebellious spirit which your brother has dared assume. However, understand me well! I am not only the mistress of this house, but am likewise your parent, and you are dependent upon me. Therefore, once for all, take heed how you manifest any undutiful conduct towards me."

"One would think that I had committed some grievous crime by the language which your ladyship uses:" and as Juliana thus spoke, the rich red blood mantled upon her cheeks and her eyes flashed fire.

"Insolent girl, beware how you provoke me!" cried Lady Saxondale.

Juliana drew herself up haughtily, and turned away with an air of complete defiance.

At this moment a door communicating with the landing outside, was flung violently open; and a woman, whose age appeared to be fifty, and who was dressed in the matronly garb of a housekeeper, entered the room, exclaiming in a sharp querulous voice, "It is abominable, and I am determined to have satisfaction. My lady, I demand protection at your hands! I cannot be insulted any longer in this way; it exceeds all human patience. The impertinent coxcomb! the petty tyrant! the cowardly hound!"

"Mabel, what in heaven's name does all this mean?" cried Lady Saxondale, rushing towards the old housekeeper—for such was the situation occupied by the woman at the mansion. "Compose yourself—tranquilize your feelings: you know that I will not suffer you to be insulted with impunity."

"But this is constantly going on," Mabel again burst forth, advancing farther into the room, and both speaking and looking as if she were desperately angry with everybody and everything. "He is always insulting me—he hates me, just because I possess your ladyship's confidence, and have been in the family for so many years. What did he mean by calling me an old beldame when he met me on the stairs? Was it that on account of my rheumatism I couldn't get out of his way quite quick enough to please my lord? But I will teach him better manners, I will! he shall respect me, the impudent puppy!"

"Mabel, Mabel, mind what you are saying!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, evidently much agitated. "You must not speak thus of his lordship."

"This woman's conduct is perfectly disgusting," said Juliana, tossing her head indignantly. "Your ladyship just now spoke in the harshest terms to me and Constance for a very trivial thing; and yet you put up with the astounding insolence of a wretched dependant."

"Dependant indeed!" yelled forth Mabel, her spiteful eyes darting reptile-looks of malignity upon the Hon. Miss Farefield. "How dare you speak of me in this way? I tell you that you are a vain and haughty minx, as your brother is a contemptible coxcomb."

"Mabel, I insist upon your holding your tongue," said Lady Saxondale, but rather in a voice of entreaty than command. "Juliana—

Constance—retire! I must have some private conversation——"

"Private conversation indeed!" echoed Mabel with increasing rage. "What I want is justice—and I mean to have it too. To be bullied and badgered by that petty tyrant, is beyond all endurance. I hate him—the whole household hates him—everybody hates him: he is a wretched cur!"

"Mother!" cried Juliana; "if you do not call the lacqueys to turn this woman out of the house——"

"Silence, miss!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot with rage. "Retire I say!"

Constance, the younger girl, was already retreating to the door, both frightened and amazed at this scene with the old housekeeper—a scene which, though not altogether new, was still far more serious than any displays of the kind that had ever previously taken place. Juliana, the elder young lady, flung a look of unmitigated contempt upon Mabel, and walked with all her mother's stateliness and haughty grandeur out of the room, closing the door with some degree of violence behind her.

What then took place between Lady Saxondale and her irate housekeeper, we know not. Suffice it to say that they remained alone together for nearly half-an-hour; and when the old woman emerged from that room again, it was with the mingled sullenness and vixenish acerbity of countenance which plainly indicated that though she had suffered herself to be appeased somehow or another, yet that it was with a very bad grace she had received such satisfaction or apologies as might have been offered, and that in her heart the sense of insult was still rankling bitterly.

Meanwhile, as they were ascending the staircase to their own chamber, the sisters had encountered one of the pages of the household, whom we may at this moment introduce to our readers. He was a youth of about eighteen, and of the most extraordinary beauty. Not very tall, his figure was slight, but as perfectly symmetrical as that of a Grecian statue representing Apollo; and the tasteful livery which he wore, consisting of a jacket tightly buttoned up to his throat, and trousers with two thin red stripes down each leg, set off his elegant shape to the utmost advantage. He had chesnut hair, which he wore long, and was naturally curling and wavy; his forehead was high and as white as that of a maiden; his brows were dark, pencilled in two thin arching lines; his eyes were of deep hazel, large and liquid, but bright as if with subdued fires. He had little colour upon the cheeks—no whiskers, nor beard upon his chin—but he was suffering his moustache to grow, and which, delicately pencilled like his brows, relieved his countenance somewhat from its otherwise girlish appearance. His lips were somewhat full; and if they had belonged to a woman, would have been denominated pouting. Being slightly apart, they always afforded a glimpse of a most beautiful set of teeth. Though already described as not of tall stature, yet his graceful length of limb, set off by the becoming apparel which he wore, made him appear taller than he really was; and altogether there was a gracefulness and a gentility about this youth which, when united with his extraordinary personal beauty, rendered him a being who though clad in a menial garb could not possibly fail to attract the notice of any one who passed him by. His name was Francis Paton—familiarly called Frank in the household; and he had been in Lady Saxondale's service for about a year.

Such was the youth whom the two sisters encountered upon the stairs as they were ascending to their own chamber to talk over together the scenes which had just occurred in the room below. Constance, the fair-haired girl, who was proceeding first, passed him by with no more notice than a young lady in her position was likely to take of one of the household domestics: but Juliana, the elder damsel, bent upon him for a moment the full power of her magnificent dark eyes; and though the youth immediately flung his own looks downwards and passed rapidly on, yet was the colour mantling upon his cheeks, and he seemed to be quivering with the excitement of the feelings which that rapid regard had so suddenly conjured up.

The sisters ascended to their chamber, where they remained together for about an hour; at the expiration of which time one of their maids came to announce that Mr. Deveril was waiting below to give them their lesson in ivory-painting.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. GUNTHORPE.

In the evening of the same day, punctually at half-past six o'clock, a loud double-knock was given at the front door of the house in which Harold Staunton occupied handsome lodgings. He and his friend Lord Saxondale were together in the drawing-room; and at the sound of that knock they approached one of the windows.

"As I live!" cried Edmund, "he has come in a Hansom Patent Cab!" and he turned away with a grimace expressive of immitigable disgust.

"I wonder whether Alfred will be able to keep his countenance as he shows him up?" observed Lord Harold: "I am sure I could not blame him if he did not. But then," he immediately added, "Alfred is so very discreet and prudent. But what on earth is the old fellow stopping to parley with the cabman for? I do believe he is disputing the fare. Good heavens! what will the people of the house think? what will the neighbours think? what——"

"Yes—and now the quarrel is waxing warmer," cried Saxondale, returning to the window and looking down into the street. "By jingo, this is devilish pleasant! A crowd is already collecting."

"You are nothing better than a reg'lar old bilk," were the words which, being vociferated forth by the indignant cabman, now reached the ears of the two young nobles who were gazing aghast from the first-floor windows. "What do you think?" pursued the cabman, turning round and appealing to those whom the disturbance had already collected: "this old fogy, with his great shirt-frill, wants me to take sixteen-pence for driving him from the *Bell and Crown* right away up in Holborn, down here to Jarmyn Street; and I say my fare's two bob, and I won't bate a farden. He's gived me eighteen-pence in silver, and demands tuppence change."

"Yes—and I mean to have it too," said Mr.

Gunthorpe, with a most imperturbable coolness. "I asked the landlord of the *Bell and Crown* what your fare was, and he told me sixteenpence: but I should have given you the eighteen if you were not insolent about it. So now I take your number."

"And pull me up afore the beak, eh?" vociferated the cabman. "Well, so do; and I'm sniggered if I don't have the ground measured at your expense too, old boy! Look at that hoss! d'ye think he wor made to go all this distance for sixteen-pence?"

"No—certainly not—nor any distance at all," answered Mr. Gunthorpe, still cool as a cucumber. "His next drive should be to the knackers' yard:" and thus speaking, the old gentleman entered the house, the door of which Alfred, who had stood the while aghast as the two nobles up-stairs, immediately shut in the face of the enraged cabman.

Mr. Gunthorpe, duly escorted by Alfred, was ushered into the drawing-room, where Lord Harold received him with as good a face as he could possibly put on; but Lord Saxondale scarcely attempted to conceal his own feelings of horror and disgust at the visitor's conduct.

"I am sorry now that I did not take the omnibus, as I first intended to do," remarked Mr. Gunthorpe, when he had paid his respects to the two noblemen. "The insolence of your London cabmen is perfectly intolerable—has not your lordship found it so?"

"I never patronize street cabs, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied Harold Staunton.

"For my part I understand they swarm with vermin," said Lord Saxondale.

"In which case they must be catching," said Mr. Gunthorpe coolly: "so your lordship had better not come near me."

There was now a pause; for neither of the two young men knew exactly what next to say. They were immeasurably disgusted with their visitor; but as their aim and hope were to make him useful, they dared not give too manifest a display of their feelings. Lord Saxondale therefore adjusted his neckcloth before the looking-glass; and Lord Harold hummed an opera-air, while contemplating the spotless polish of his patent-leather boots as he sat lazily lolling back in his chair.

"You see I was punctual," said Mr. Gunthorpe, drawing forth a huge old-fashioned gold watch about the size of a turnip, and having a massive chain with at least a dozen large seals and keys by way of appendages. "I have also brought a pretty good appetite with me. I took a chop in the City at one, and have had nothing since."

"Dinner will be served up almost immediately, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lord Harold, conquering his aversion as much as he was able, so as to behave civilly towards the old gentleman. "Have you been very busy in the City to-day?"

"Very busy indeed," was the response. "I and Snuffley—that's my attorney—have had a great deal to do together. If I had not thought it would have been too great a liberty, I should have brought Snuffley with me: but——"

"I should have been charmed to have entertained Mr. Snuffley on *your* account," said Lord Harold: but he could not prevent himself from speaking in a cold and reserved tone.

"What a funny name," tittered Lord Saxondale. "Snuffley!—he! he! he! But I have noticed that many City men and middle-class people have very queer names."

"One name is as good as another, for anything I know," observed Mr. Gunthorpe curtly: "and I am sure that Snuffley's name is better at the bottom of a cheque than many a name which has descended to its West-End bearer from the Norman Conquest."

"Ah! I date my family back to the time of the Tudors," said Lord Saxondale, drawing himself up with an air of the most consummate conceit.

"And mine is derived from a cellar in Clerkenwell," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "My father, God rest his soul! was a poor shoemaker: and my mother used to take in washing, go out charing, and do little odd jobs of that kind. Such as you see me, my lords, I was educated at a charity-school, and have fought my way up in the world from being a muffin-boy to what I am now:" and Mr. Gunthorpe looked complacently round upon the two young aristocrats.

They were aghast. Mingled horror and dismay were depicted upon their countenances, no consideration of any ulterior objects having the power at the moment to cause them to master those feelings. Indeed, they could not; it was the natural expression of haughty aristocratic prejudices terribly shocked by the plain unvarnished tale of Mr. Gunthorpe's earlier history. He did not however seem to notice the consternation which his narrative had excited, but looked as if he felt far more proud of the position which by his industry, as he represented, he had carved out for himself, than the two young aristocrats could possibly be of their lengthened genealogy and ancestral honours.

The folding doors at the extremity of the drawing-room were now pompously thrown open, and the dinner table appeared in the midst of the apartment thus revealed. The noblemen and Mr. Gunthorpe took their seats. The former, having somewhat recovered from their shock, were rather curious to observe how the old gentleman would conduct himself at table, and were terribly afraid that he would be guilty of some awful solecism in etiquette so as to horrify the fastidiousness of Alfred and the footman. They were therefore most agreeably surprised and considerably relieved when they found that he at once appeared as well versed as themselves in all the refinements and niceties of the dinner-table,—not tucking his napkin up to his chin, nor eating fish with his knife, nor biting instead of breaking his bread, nor asking for malt liquor, nor falling into any of the little errors which they had expected. He took wine with them, too, in the approved manner; and though he spoke but little, yet so long as the domestics were in the room, he did not give utterance to a single syllable at all calculated to shock the aristocratic pride of Lord Harold Staunton or Lord Saxondale.

Thus the dinner passed off agreeably enough: the dessert was placed upon the table, the valet and the footman withdrew, and the decanters began to circulate.

"Do you propose to make a long stay in England, Mr. Gunthorpe?" asked Lord Harold, as he sipped his claret.

"I think of settling here altogether now," was the reply. "I believe your noble uncle the Marquis of Eagledean informed you in the letter of introduc-

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tion which I presented to your lordship, that I have retired from business——"

"Yes—from banking."

"Well, from banking then, if you prefer it. I suppose that the term *business* is a *leetle* too vulgar?"

"Between you and me, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe, it *is* vulgar—excessively vulgar."

"Grates upon one's nerves, eh?" said the old gentleman, seeming to laugh good-naturedly.

"Oh, terribly!" cried Lord Saxondale. "To me it's just like cutting iron with a file."

"Well then," proceeded Mr. Gunthorpe, "as I was observing, I have retired from banking, and mean to settle down somewhere in England. I told Snuff——I beg your pardon—my attorney I mean—I won't mention his name, because that also will most likely grate upon your nerves: but I told him to look out and see if he could purchase me an estate——"

"Ah! but mind what you are doing, Mr. Gunthorpe," exclaimed Lord Harold. "Don't leave it to your solicitor——"

"Solicitor?" echoed the old gentleman. "Is that the fashionable name?"

"Yes—we never say *attorney* at the West End—always *solicitor*. But as I was going to remark," continued Lord Harold, "don't for heaven's sake let this solicitor of your's have the looking out after an estate for you. He would only think of buying you some tract of land over which a railway is going to run, so that he may have the job of proceeding against the directors for compensation on your behalf. Besides, his taste cannot possibly be good. There would be no pineries and vineries, no hothouses and greenhouses, no artificial pieces of water, upon the estate of a lawyer's choosing: and very likely he would buy you a brick-field, so that you might speculate in houses that he might draw up the leases and sue the tenants for their rent."

"Then what would your lordship advise?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, seeming to acknowledge all the seriousness and gravity of the young nobleman's objections.

"Why, since my revered and respected uncle the Marquis has recommended you so especially to my attention," answered Lord Harold, "I feel it a duty to offer my services in this matter."

"Ah! then your lordship would undertake to find me a suitable estate?" said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"With the greatest pleasure in the world. But the wine stands with you."

"Thank you, I am getting on uncommonly well. The fact is," added Mr. Gunthorpe, "not being accustomed to English wines—or rather, I should say, the wines you drink in England—your lordship's champagne, madeira, sherry, and port have already got up into my head."

"Oh! they won't hurt you," exclaimed Lord Harold. "So help yourself."

"Hurt you—not they!" cried Lord Saxondale. "I can get as drunk as an owl on good wine, and never feel the effects next day. It's only bad wine that plays the very devil with one."

"Your experience is doubtless great," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "How old is your lordship? Thirty or five-and-thirty?"

"Thirty be hanged!" ejaculated Saxondale. "I am only nineteen and a few months: but I have seen a little of life though—have I not, Staunton?——and it's this experience that perhaps makes me look older than I really am."

"Very likely," said Mr. Gunthorpe, as he helped himself and passed the decanter. "But as your lordship," he continued, again addressing himself to Harold, "was so kind as to offer me your advice and assistance in settling myself down, perhaps you will sketch out some little plan that you would have me adopt? If I do not follow the whole details, yet some of them may at least prove valuable suggestions."

"First, let me ask your exact position, my dear Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lord Harold, flinging a significant look across the table at Saxondale, as much as to imply that they were getting the old gentleman into the right line to make him useful. "You are very rich, of course? *that* we can pretty well guess. But are you married—any children——"

"I am a widower, and all my children are grown up and provided for," returned Mr. Gunthorpe: "so I have only to think of myself."

"Good!" observed Lord Harold. "In the first place, then, you must leave that insufferable place the *Bell and Crown*, the very name of which raises up odours of pea-soup and boiled beef——"

"I can assure you it is a most excellent hotel," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe; "and I had serious intentions of asking you and Lord Saxondale to dine with me to-morrow. Their bitter beer is excellent."

"We never touch malt," answered Lord Harold: "nor must you, Mr. Gunthorpe, in future—for we mean to launch you out into fashionable life. So you must leave this *Bell and Crown*, and come up for the present to some first-rate West End hotel."

"But it must be in a line of omnibuses to the City," observed Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Oh, fie! omnibuses indeed!" exclaimed Lord Harold. "You must have a drag of your own."

"Leave me to find our friend a suitable trap," observed Saxondale.

"Drag—trap?" repeated Mr. Gunthorpe, looking bewildered. "Those words sound very vulgar indeed to my ears."

"Perfectly fashionable and correct, I can assure you," rejoined Lord Harold. "Well then, we are agreed so far that you come up to the West End, establish yourself at an hotel, and set up your drag. Then you must have a tiger——"

"God forbid!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, turning pale. "I have an abhorrence for wild beasts. But why not a boa constrictor at once?"

"You don't understand," replied Lord Harold "we mean an elegant little livery servant. And then you must have your valet and your groom. These will do in the shape of slaveys for the present. Then as to horses, leave me and Saxondale to procure them for you: we know the sort of thing you require. But this is not quite all. You must have your box at the Opera; and by rights, in order to be quite fashionable—but I don't do more than just hint at it—you ought to have——"

"What?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Your mistress," was the response.

"Will you undertake to find that also?" inquired the old gentleman, refilling his glass, and seeming

to sway a little to and fro in his chair, as if the wine had indeed got up into his head.

"Oh, certainly! We will find you everything; and while you are making a perfect round of pleasure at the West End, we will be looking out for an estate with a splendid mansion upon it, beautiful grounds, a deer-park, and everything proper. We must also have you presented at Court; and I don't know—but I dare say it can be contrived," added Lord Harold, with a mysterious air and knowing look, "to get you a baronetcy."

"Ah, indeed!" cried Mr. Gunthorpe. "Well, I don't know but that I should like a handle to my name. How my poor father and mother, the cobbler and charwoman, would stare if they could only get up out of their graves in Clerkenwell Churchyard and see their son a baronet!"

"I am sure you deserve a baronetcy," said Lord Harold, with a slight grimace at that reference to his guest's parentage, "for having made so fine a fortune. How much did you tell us just now?"

"I don't think that I mentioned the amount," responded Mr. Gunthorpe, now beginning to hiccup: "but when I went into the whole affair with Snuff—my attor——solicitor I mean, we found it a little above half a million."

"Well, that's not bad," said Lord Harold, sipping his wine coolly, as if he were quite accustomed to contemplate such fortunes. "But what is your christian name?"

"Jonathan," answered the old gentleman, with a somewhat vacant stare.

"Sir Jonathan Gunthorpe," observed Harold. "Excellent! It would look well enough in the *Court Guide*. Edmund, you must introduce our very intimate and particular friend Gunthorpe to Lady Saxondale and your sisters."

"Oh! Lady Saxondale will be delighted to see him," exclaimed Edmund: and as he spoke he could not help smiling at the idea of presenting that queer-looking figure to his haughty and brilliant mother,—with whom, by the bye, he was on no terms to present anybody at all.

"I am sure your lordships," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "are uncommon kind; and if in return I can do you any little service, I shall be glad."

He spoke these words with much apparent difficulty, swaying from side to side on his chair—hiccupping—and surveying first one of the young noblemen, and then the other, with the dull and vacant gaze of complete inebriety.

"Well, I hope that this friendship which has begun so pleasantly," observed Lord Harold, "will continue for ever. But when I look at you, Mr. Gunthorpe, I really think you might marry again. A hale, active, intelligent, good-looking gentleman like yourself——"

"But I am sixty," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Pooh, nonsense! you make a mistake. You can't be more than forty-five."

"Well, perhaps I am not," observed the old gentleman, looking uncommonly bewildered and owlish. "My father and mother must have deceived me; and I will go and consult the parish-registers to-morrow. But about this marriage? In addition to all the other things you are going to find me, can you manage a suitable wife?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Harold. "I have already got a Dowager-Countess in my eye for you; and if she won't do, then there's a splendid Baroness with eight thousand a-year."

"Oh! between the two I am pretty sure to be suited," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, refilling his glass again, while Harold looked across the table to Saxondale with a glance that implied what a precious old fool their companion was.

"And what fun we will have at the wedding!" cried Edmund.

"But again I say that you overwhelm me with obligations," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, appearing to speak with more and more difficulty, and to be troubled with more frequent hiccups.

"Well," said Lord Harold, assuming quite a careless, indifferent tone, and speaking in an off-hand manner; "it does so happen just at the present crisis that I am pressed for five thousand. In fact, I have overdrawn my bankers, and if you would accommodate me for six weeks or a couple of months——"

"Oh, certainly! replied Mr. Gunthorpe; "with the greatest pleasure in the world. Five thousand is a poor loan to advance to one who is going to assist me in buying estates, horses, carriages, and so on, and who is first to provide me with a mistress and then with a wife. Give me pen and ink."

Mr. Gunthorpe had made this speech in a somewhat more fluent and collected manner than he had been talking for the last hour; and indeed both Harold and Edmund were for a moment seized with a little uneasiness as they thought they observed a vein of sarcasm running through his words. But as his looks corroborated not this suspicion, they grew perfectly satisfied again, and rapidly exchanged glances of delight as the old gentleman asked for the ink. Writing materials were speedily supplied; and Mr. Gunthorpe, diving his hand deep down into one of his capacious pockets, drew forth a cheque-book, which to the two noblemen was mighty pleasant to behold. Laying it open upon the table before him, Mr. Gunthorpe proceeded to fill up one of the draughts: but it seemed that he had no small difficulty in steadying his hand to write, while his head kept bobbing down as if his wig would bob off also into a dish of strawberries just before him. However, he succeeded in writing the cheque for five thousand pounds; and then tearing out the leaf, handed it to Lord Harold, who, folding it negligently up, thrust it with true aristocratic listlessness into his waistcoat pocket.

"By the bye," he said, "I will just give you my note of hand for this."

"Don't trouble yourself. I dare say it will be all the same in the end," answered Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Well, I will give it to you next time we meet. And now I suppose you mean to make a night of it with us? What shall we do? It's just ten o'clock," added Lord Harold, looking at his watch. "Shall we go and lounge in to some hell?"

"Don't you think it's better to wait till you are compelled to go there?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, apparently with amazing innocence.

"I mean the gaming-house," rejoined Harold. "Not that I should propose to *you* to play, Mr Gunthorpe. Oh, no—not for the world! But it struck me that if you would like to see a little of London life——"

"I don't think it was exactly for that purpose your uncle gave me letters of introduction to you

Besides, this wine has got into my head; and so, if you will be good enough to send and order me a cab, I will take my leave."

"Well, if you insist I won't detain you," said Lord Harold Staunton, ringing the bell: for the truth was that now he had got as much as he required out of the old gentleman, at least for the present, he did not care how soon the said old gentleman took his departure. "But I say," he observed, as a thought struck him, when he had issued instructions to the footman who answered his summons, relative to the cab, "if you happen to be writing to my uncle, you won't let him know any thing that we have been saying or doing this evening?"

"Why, is there any harm in it?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, rising from his seat and tottering somewhat.

"Oh, no!—no harm!" replied Harold: "only it's just as well to avoid touching upon such matters. You see, the Marquis is a precious eccentric old fool, and might put a very different construction on things from what they really out to bear."

"So he might—so he might," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Therefore, if your lordship wishes it, I certainly will not mention anything at all upon the subject when I write to the Marquis of Eagledean."

"That will be best," rejoined Staunton.

The footman now re-appeared; but as he could not possibly bring himself to mention the vulgar name of *cab*, he, with much delicate forethought for the aristocratic feelings of his master and Lord Saxondale, announced that "the conveyance was at the door."

"Well, good evening, my lords," said Mr. Gunthorpe, shaking them both with such violence by the hand that they very nearly cried out. "I am much indebted to you for your hospitality. It is an evening which I shall not forget in a hurry; and I hope that time will show how I can appreciate your conduct."

"Good night, old fellow," said Lord Saxondale. "You are a regular trump after all."

"It makes me proud to think that I have your lordship's good opinion," answered the retired banker with a low bow.

"Now, when are we to meet again," asked Lord Harold, "to begin putting into force the various things we have been talking about?"

"I will write to your lordship to-morrow—from the *Bell and Crown*," answered Mr. Gunthorpe: and he thereupon took his leave, walking out of the room a trifle more steadily than the young noblemen thought he would be enabled to do.

And then this same mean old gentleman, who had quarrelled with the cabman for his fare and insisted upon having twopence change, dropt a guinea into the hand of the tall stiff footman who held the front door open; so that the flunkey became all in a moment as obsequiously polite as possible—handed Mr. Gunthorpe into the vehicle—and having ascertained the place of destination, felt himself by no means shocked at having to bawl out, "All right, cabman! *Bell and Crown*, Holborn!"

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale knew not exactly what to think of their friend Mr. Gunthorpe. The five thousand pound cheque seemed certainly an evidence that he was by no means the keen, cautious, and sharp-witted individual they had at first expected: but on the other hand, there appeared to have been a slightly perceptible undercurrent of sarcasm in many of the observations he had made. However, the two young aristocrats came to the conclusion that though sharp in one sense, he was "green" enough in others; and that he was most anxious to become introduced to the sphere of fashion.

On the following morning, long before Lord Harold had risen, a letter was delivered at his lodgings; and when he perused it, he found the contents to run thus:—

"*Bell and Crown*, Holborn.

"My dear Lord Harold,

"Having maturely reflected upon your various kind propositions of last night, I feel myself so utterly unworthy of such an overwhelming mass of bounties that I am compelled to decline them. I know that I am but a vulgar citizen, and consequently but little fitted for the perfumed atmosphere of your aristocracy. I think that Mr. Snuffley's idea of an estate will come up to the standard of my ambition; and until I succeed in procuring one, I feel too comfortable at the *Bell and Crown* to render it necessary to change my quarters to a West-End hotel. As for a *drag* or *trap*, I am of opinion that a coach-builder in Long Acre may be safely entrusted with the order, and until it is completed I shall doubtless find the omnibuses commodious enough for my purposes. In respect to horses, the hostler of the *Bell and Crown* is an excellent judge, and will put me in the way of getting what I want. Relative to an Opera-box, I am not formed to shine in one; and being conscious of my own defects, do not wish to make myself ridiculous. As for a mistress, with which fashionable appurtenance your lordship so generously offered to supply me, I do not wish to deprive you of your own, nor yet have to support one for the benefit of my noble friends. With regard to presentation at Court, I am too much occupied with Snuffley for the present to think of kicking my heels at St. James's. The Baronetcy, which your lordship volunteered to obtain for me, will be quite in time when I reach the rank of Lord Mayor of London, or something of that sort. Lastly, in respect to a wife, I should be truly sorry to deprive your lordship of the chance of obtaining the fair hand of the Dowager-Countess, or hooking the splendid Baroness with £8000 a-year.

"I remain, my dear Lord Harold,

"Your most obliged and obedient Servant,

"JONATHAN GUNTHORPE."

Lord Harold Staunton was at first inclined to be angry on reading this letter: but as he glanced over it a second time, he could not help bursting out into a laugh,—which had scarcely subsided when his friend Lord Saxondale made his appearance.

"Well, after all," exclaimed Harold, "the old fellow saw through us completely. Here, read this letter! The sarcasm that marks it is beyond mistake."

"But why on earth did he lend you the money?" cried Saxondale, when he had perused the letter which his friend handed to him.

"Oh! I suppose merely through purse-proud vanity," was the response. "But after all, it is perhaps just as well that we should be quit of him: for it would have been a horrid bore to introduce such a comical old blade as that to our friends. So let us think only of enjoying ourselves with his money, and leave him in peace to his boiled beef and bitter ale at the *Bell and Crown*."

CHAPTER IX.

ANGELA VIVALDI.

It was Saturday night again, and the Opera was once more crowded to excess. Bright and joyous was that scene, presenting a wondrous contrast to the care-fraught world without, where the turmoil of jarring interests never ceases and the struggle of conflicting passions is never at rest.

And yet, when surveying that immense amphitheatre, thronged with the highest in rank, the proudest in title, the richest in wealth, the most elegant in attire, and the loveliest in personal charms,—must not the thinking observer ask himself whether if his eye could penetrate beneath that brilliant surface and read deep down to the innermost recesses of the heart, he would find bliss, contentment, and joy in every soul? Alas, no! In those festooned alcoves many a smiling lip and radiant brow served but as a mask to conceal cares the most poignant, anxieties the most intense, jealousies the most fierce, envies the most torturing. Where flowers were upon the brow and diamonds upon the hair, the brain might throb beneath; and within those bosoms that were decked with costliest jewels, might the darkest and ignoblest passions be raging. Nor less did looks of seeming kindness that were exchanged and honied words of greeting that passed between acquaintances and friends, serve to conceal most bitter, rancorous, and implacable hostilities. Amongst those beings who appeared the fairest and gentlest, were some whose bosoms burnt with the devouring fires of insatiable passion: amongst the most envied and the most worshipped, were some whose unrequited love or betrayed affections had already made a ruin and a desert of their hearts. There too, amidst the galaxy of splendour, rank, and fashion, were the vain repinings of beauty on the wane, concealed beneath flashing gems, the artifice of cosmetics, and studied smiles. Oh! if the polished surface of that bright and joyous scene were dazzling, and thrilling, and overpowering to contemplate,—yet were the veil which shrouded the secret thoughts drawn aside and the interior of every heart exposed, the eye would perhaps have recoiled in amazement and in horror from the chaos of feelings and pandemonium of passions thus revealed to the gaze. Might it not then be said that the stage-lights served but to separate two sets of actors—the audience and the performers?

As on the former occasion when we introduced our readers to the Opera, Lady Florina and some female friends were there, accompanied by Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale. In the pit, occupying one of the foremost seats just behind the orchestra, was William Deveril, the young professor of drawing and painting whose name has been before mentioned. In the Royal Box Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Kent were seated: behind them stood several lords and ladies in waiting—those obsequious hangers-on of Royalty who are more contemptible in their grovelling sycophancy than the most servile toad-eaters and lick-spittles are in a less elevated sphere of life. In a neighbouring box to the Royal one, was a German Prince—the reigning Duke of some nameless State consisting of a few beggarly acres—and who was attended by some very queer-looking persons, whom the newspapers next day represented as "a brilliant suite." Indeed, this Illustrious Prince had paid the present visit to England attended by the principal officers of his Court and the staff of his Army,—his coachman being at the same time Field-Marshal and Commander-in-Chief, his valet the Prime Minister of the Duchy, his head cook the Lord Chamberlain, and his butler the Master of the Horse. All these high functionaries of State were dressed in splendid uniforms; and their most Serene and Illustrious master was covered with stars, orders, and decorations. It was a very brilliant suite indeed!

We have already said that the house was thronged to suffocation: we may add that it was crowded as it had never been before. When the doors were first thrown open and the crush took place, the German Prince had got his head so jammed against a pillar that if it had not been of a thickness truly enviable on such an occasion, it would have been squeezed as flat as a pancake. Immense was the injury done to white waistcoats, neck-ties, and other articles of apparel—feet were trodden into jellies—and one or two elderly gentlemen lost their wigs in the crowd. But despite these and other similar misadventures, the throng had kept pouring on until the whole house was filled, as above stated.

We do not intend to speak of the opera that was performed on the occasion, nor to notice the enchantments of the singing or the music. Our object is to introduce to the reader the cynosure of the evening's attraction—the inimitable and charming Angela Vivaldi. To say that she was beautiful were to say nothing: she was lovely almost beyond all power of description—fairer than the fairest image which painter ever drew, sculptor ever modelled, or poet ever dreamt. Her age was about eighteen; and without exception she was the most ravishing embodiment of female charms that ever burst upon the delighted vision. When she appeared upon the stage, enthusiastic was the reception she experienced; and whatever cares, or torturing feelings, or malignant passions that might have before been agitating in even the unhappiest hearts and most racked of souls, were temporarily forgotten now, in the contemplation of that divine creature.

Her countenance was of the most illuminating beauty. The high-arched brows—the straight chiselled nose—the small ripe mouth—the rounded chin—and the oval outline of the face, were all of classic faultlessness. Her eyes, large and dark, were full of fire, and yet had nothing bold in their expression: but bright as her glances were, there was still a sweetness in them that bespoke a purity and an innocence of soul,—so that her looks warmed the feelings without inflaming them. Her shining dark hair clustered about her well-shaped head, and shone with a natural glory of its own brighter than the blaze of light which flooded the whole scene. Her complexion was dazzlingly pure and transparent; and the mantling colour upon her cheeks derived not its carnation hue from the effect of art, but was the rich vermeil bloom shed there by nature's own hand. The swan-like neck sloped off to shoulders just rounded sufficiently for plumpness, and expanded into a bosom full enough for feminine beauty, without marring the statuesque perfection of the entire bust. She was tall, and though slender, not thin

nor while replete with bayadere elasticity and willowy litheness, her figure still seemed filled out to all its just proportions. Thus aerial grace was blended with a sculptural richness of contours: sylphid elegance was united with a rounded fulness of charms. Had she been bred in some far-off western forest, like a fawn, she could not have been of more unconscious elasticity of carriage, nor of more unstudied gracefulness of mien. Upright as a dart, the suppleness of her form and elegant freedom of her gait would have shown her at once, though robed in flowing drapery, to be a creature of perfect make. But now her short raiment, reaching only to her knees, revealed the sweeping length, the straightness, and the beautiful symmetry of the limbs. Nature had given her an instep finely arched; and this, united to an exquisite foot and a delicate ankle, completed that air of high-bred gracefulness which may be observed in the figure of a woman as well as in an Arabian courser.

But all that we have as yet said of Angela Vivaldi can convey to the mind of the reader but a faint idea of her ravishing charms. Let us behold her now, as she moves in the bewitching dance. Here again the power of language altogether fails us, either to depict the winning graces of her style, the beauty of her attitudes, or the sylph-like delicacy of her movements. It was the poetry of motion expressed and personified in a being of beauty to embellish it and of soul to comprehend it. Now, as her shining dark hair clustered over her high and polished brow, she shook it away with the sweetest and most innocently coquettish toss of the head imaginable: then, as she appeared to warm alike to the excitement of the dance, the influence of the music, and the rapturous applause which incessantly burst forth from the crowded house, a beaming smile appeared upon her budding lips, suggesting the idea of a young love cradled in a just opening rose. And looked she not the Queen of Love herself, come down upon that earth which she scarcely seemed to press with her aerial feet?—treading indeed so lightly that, still likening her to Venus, she seemed to stand on the froth of a fresh-broken wave. The spectacle was delicious. Every muscle and limb of the enchanting creature appeared to be in harmonious motion. Blooming with youth and shining with divinity, she resembled the Medicean statue wakened by the Pygmalion-inspiration of love into the full glow of voluptuous yet ethereal existence. To gaze upon her, invested as she was with the most ravishing charms—to behold her starry eyes sparkling more bright than the diamonds on any high-born maiden's brow—to mark the graceful curves and dreamy waving of her arms—to follow the easy undulations of her sylphid shape, the gentle bendings of her head and neck, the movements of her graceful limbs, and the play of her exquisite feet,—it would seem as if all the Goddesses and Graces had lent their brightest charms and most ravishing fascinations to concentrate all their power in that one being who thus moved in loveliness and glory before thousands of enraptured eyes!

Amongst that almost countless throng of spectators, many and varied were the feelings with which the beautiful *danseuse* was contemplated. There was however one prevailing sentiment of ravished admiration on the part of all—and likewise one universal feeling as to the beauty of Angela Vivaldi. An angel in name—she seemed an angel in form likewise,—a truth which not even envy or jealousy dared hesitate to acknowledge! But apart from those common feelings of admiration for the exquisite dancer's art and of the woman's perfect beauty, there were individual sentiments which in a few instances we must pause to define. Lord Harold Staunton, for example, was more perfectly smitten on the present occasion with Angela Vivaldi's personal charms than he was on the first night of her appearance; and he regretted having encouraged his friend Saxondale to think of winning her for himself. As for this young nobleman—the conceited and unprincipled Edmund—he had not even the good taste to conceal in the presence of Florina the ardent passion with which the lovely dancer inspired him. Elsewhere, in another box, was some old Marquis, rolling in riches, but with one foot in the grave, who was revolving in his mind whether it should be fifty or a hundred thousand pounds that the very next morning he would send to offer this Signora Vivaldi as a proof of his admiration, a symbol of his hope, and an earnest of his liberality; while in an adjacent box was a middle-aged Duke, likewise settling plans to win the favour of the charming Angela. Farther on still, was another of England's titled peers—a widower and immensely rich—who had already made up his mind to offer his hand in marriage to Signora Vivaldi, and thus, as he flattered himself, with one bold stroke carry off the prize in the presence of all competitors. Even the German Prince had his cogitations upon a similar subject, and whispered to his head cook—or rather Lord Chamberlain—that he had serious intentions of taking the *danseuse* as his morganatic spouse.

But there was one individual present who seemed animated with far different feelings from all that we have yet described, as he gazed upon Angela Vivaldi. This individual was William Deveril. It was not with the devouring eagerness of passion—nor with the wonder of admiration—nor with the hope of conquest—nor with aught akin to an impure feeling, that he followed the bewitching girl in all her sylphid movements: but it was with a beaming satisfaction upon his countenance, as if he experienced the purest and kindest sympathy in those feelings of triumph which glowed in her own bosom. There was still one other person in the house that night, who seemed to take no ordinary interest in the performance and success of Angela Vivaldi—and this was Mr. Gunthorpe. Like Deveril however, the old gentleman surveyed not her beauties with gloating looks—nor did he devour her charms through the medium of an opera-glass: but seated at some distance from the stage, and in the humblest part of the house, he contemplated her with a sort of benevolent satisfaction, as if it did his heart good to witness the triumph of a young creature whose virtue was reported to be as pure as her beauty was ravishing.

At length the performance was over, and Angela Vivaldi received the floral crowns which aristocratic hands threw upon the stage. Handkerchiefs waved—the house rang again and again with plaudits—the enthusiasm was immense. When she retired, it seemed as if the source of all the lustre which flooded the vast building had disappeared from the view, although that dazzling light itself still remained. Then, as the throng began to pour forth

rom the house, several of those hoary profligates and titled aspirants who had conceived designs relative to Angela Vivaldi, endeavoured to avail themselves of the license, previously enjoyed by them, of passing behind the scenes. But they experienced a peremptory refusal. In vain did they remonstrate: they were told that on the first night of the Signora's appearance, several persons had been thus admitted to that privileged region, but that their presence was distasteful to the fair *danseuse* and she had stipulated against a repetition of what she had regarded as an annoyance. One or two noblemen threatened and blustered: but the stage-authorities were inexorable, and the claimants for admission behind the scenes were compelled to retire in dudgeon and mortification.

Outside the theatre, however, the astute Alfred, Lord Harold Staunton's valet, was keeping watch. Handsomely dressed, and without appearing to have any particular object in view, he was smoking his cigar in the most finished style of indolent dandyism, so that no one could have fancied that he was any other than one of the rakish loungers who infest the Opera-colonnades from seven in the evening until past midnight. Pacing thus leisurely to and fro in the neighbourhood of the stage-door, he presently beheld some of the minor performers and ballet-girls issuing forth, either singly or in twos and threes, and looking very different indeed in their own habitual garb from what they were when bedecked in their stage-costumes. Anon, some underling rushed out to order a cab, into which one of the superior performers or better paid actresses stepped; and away the vehicle rolled. A few minutes passed, and then a private carriage being summoned to the stage-door, Grisi, the Queen of Song, was handed forth by some male companion, with whom she took her departure in the splendid equipage. Then several more street cabs were called into requisition by the dispersing *artistes*: another private carriage or two likewise drew up, received their well-paid owners, and dashed away again.

All this time Alfred was lounging about with as much seeming listlessness as heretofore, but in reality keeping a keen watch upon every female who issued from the stage-door, in the expectation of recognizing the charming countenance of Signora Vivaldi. But when a long interval had elapsed and she did not make her appearance, he began to think she must have taken her departure by some other means of egress from the theatre. Still however he resolved to watch the stage-door until it closed; and presently a neat little equipage was summoned from the adjacent street leading out of the Haymarket, by the theatrical underling before alluded to. This equipage consisted of a light and unpretending carriage of the kind which has taken its name from Lord Brougham; it was drawn by one horse, and was driven by a coachman neatly dressed in plain clothes. The stage underling opened the door of this vehicle; and in a few minutes a lady passed rapidly out of the theatre, with an ample cloak flung negligently over her shoulders. She had on a simple straw bonnet, and a veil was drawn over her countenance. She was attended by a middle-aged gentleman, whom Alfred knew to be connected with the management of the Opera, and who was now exhibiting a most respectful attention towards this lady. The valet could not obtain a satisfactory view of her countenance through the dark veil; but from the partial glimpse which he did gain, he felt assured that she was none other than the one for whom he was watching. Besides, her height—the graceful ease and elegant dignity of her walk—and her entire appearance, so far as he could judge of it muffled up as she was, left no doubt in his mind that the fair one was Signora Vivaldi.

The gentleman who had escorted her to her carriage, assisted her to enter—closed the door himself—paused for a minute to say a few words to her at the window—then shook hands with her, and stopped for an instant on the curb-stone of the colonnade to gaze after the little equipage as it drove rapidly off. Alfred hastened up to a street cab, leapt on the box by the side of the driver and bade him follow the vehicle which had just rolled away from the stage-entrance.

The neat little equipage, followed by the cab, passed up the Haymarket—then threaded the Quadrant—proceeded up Regent Street—continued its way along Portland Place—and entered the Regent's Park. Alfred thought to himself that the fair *danseuse* probably lived in this salubrious quarter of London: but he was deceived—for the little equipage still continued rolling on, turning out of the Regent's Park into Camden Town, across which it cut towards Brecknock Hill, which at that time, though now pretty nearly covered with buildings, had scarcely a house upon it. Up the ascent of the hill the brougham went at a good pace, the cab still following; and Alfred thought that if the pursuit were to last much longer, the coachman's suspicions could not fail to be excited. Indeed, it seemed as if something of this kind were already the case; for on reaching the brow of the hill he drove down the descent on the other side at a rattling pace, already beginning to distance the very inferior animal which was dragging the street-cab. The night however being very beautiful and clear, Alfred and the cabman had no difficulty in keeping in sight the equipage which they were pursuing, and which was now entering the district of Holloway.

"We must not lose it after all this trouble," said Alfred to the cabman. "Spare not the whip upon that miserable hack of your's! Your reward shall be in proportion to the success that I experience."

The cabman whipped his horse, and it regained some of its lost ground as the neat little equipage in front, crossing the broad road of Holloway, lashed into what was then a beautiful lane with a green hedge on each side, and which bore, as it indeed still bears, the name of the Seven Sisters' Road. Ultimately the equipage stopped at a little villa some distance up this road, and standing in a somewhat lonely situation. Alfred made the cabman drive past, so as to create the impression that his destination lay farther on; and he beheld the lady emerge from the brougham and enter the villa. Having caused the cabman to drive on as far as he thought it necessary for the sake of appearances, the valet bade him turn back; and at a late hour, or rather an early one in the morning, he reached his master's lodgings in Jermyn Street.

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale were sitting up, drinking punch and smoking cigars, in expectation of the valet's return; and the moment

Alfred made his appearance in the room, they saw by his countenance that he had been successful. He at once gave the two young noblemen an account of his proceedings; and they applauded the perseverance and skill which he had exhibited in tracing the fair one to her suburban abode.

"But now, my dear Harold," said Lord Saxondale, when the valet had retired, "we have not yet settled who is to avail himself of the information just obtained. You say that you are considerably smitten with the Signora, and that her brilliant appearance this night has made a much deeper impression on you than it did on the first occasion. On the other hand I am equally mad in love with her——no disparagement to Florina——for you know, of course, that when I say *love*, it is a very different sort of thing from what one feels for the young lady one is going to marry."

"Well, well, you need not sermonize upon it, Edmund," said Lord Harold. "We don't want to be rivals in this business; and our pretensions are equally great: that is to say, it is nothing but pretension altogether on either side. So the fairest thing will be to toss up who is to avail himself of the information Alfred has brought us."

"By all means!" cried Lord Saxondale, delighted with the course proposed, which he thought had something manly and of a sportsman-like character about it: then taking a sovereign from his waistcoat-pocket, he tossed it up in the air, crying, "Heads or tails?"

"Heads!" exclaimed Lord Harold.

"'Tis tails!" actually shrieked forth Saxondale, with childish delight.

"It is for you, then," rejoined Lord Harold, with a slight accent of pique and vexation, "to do the best you can in this matter:"—but instantly recovering his good-humour, he refilled his glass and said, "Here's success to your love-suit with Signora Vivaldi!"

CHAPTER X.

THE COTTAGE.

THE next day Lord Saxondale did not go near his friend Lord Harold Staunton: but he sent a brief note of excuse, stating that he meant to devote himself to the new enterprise which he had in hand. Having taken his breakfast in his own room, so as to avoid encountering his mother, with whom he did not wish at the present time to have any fresh "scene," he remained secluded there all the morning to deliberate upon the course he should adopt in order to obtain admission to the presence of the fair Angela Vivaldi. From what he had heard concerning her, he saw that it would be useless to write her a note beseeching her to grant him an interview: for during the week which had elapsed since he first discussed the subject with Lord Harold, he had learnt from several quarters sufficient to convince him that it was not by any of the usual means of gallantry that the beautiful *danseuse* was to be won. It may be remembered that he had originally thought of addressing a note to Angela Vivaldi at the Opera itself; but Harold had assured him then, that if he did so his missive would only be treated with contempt. He had since ascertained that such had been the fate experienced by several other aspirants in the same quarter, and who had adopted those vulgar means of imparting their hope and their proposals to the object of their passion. Saxondale therefore saw that some other plan must be chalked out, and that the whole affair must be managed with the utmost delicacy and caution.

But how was it that after all the reports he had heard relative to Angela's virtue, he could possibly be vain and arrogant enough to expect that he himself was the fortunate being whose aspirations were to be crowned with success? It was for the very reason of his being thus vain and arrogant, that he entertained such a hope. Conceited to a degree, he had the highest opinion of himself, and would not believe the truth which the mirror told him, that he was very far from good-looking. On the contrary, he flattered himself that he possessed every qualification for becoming a perfect lady-killer—that wherever he chose to smile, hearts must be won—and that it was impossible for any female to resist his powers of fascination. In addition to the high opinion which he entertained relative to himself, he had a very mean one of feminine virtue in general; and we have already seen that in his first conversation with Lord Harold respecting Angela, he flippantly ignored the possibility of chastity in connexion with any female figuring upon the stage. From his earliest infancy, also, he had been so fawned upon, "my-lorded," toadied, and flattered that he really believed there was something talismanic in the name of Saxondale, and that the brilliancy of his rank, the immensity of the fortune which would soon be at his entire disposal, the splendour attached to his long line of ancestry, and his own personal qualifications, would prove altogether overpowering if he had but an opportunity of playing off the whole artillery of these attractions upon the young *danseuse*.

But what plan was he to pursue in order to obtain access to her? He had decided upon not writing to solicit an interview; and he reasoned that it would be equally useless to present himself at her suburban villa and send in his card with the hope of being admitted to her presence. He thought that in the first instance he had better *reconnoitre* her abode, and endeavour, if possible, to scrape acquaintance with her lady's-maid, or any one of her domestics who might furnish him with hints for prosecuting his scheme: he might also ascertain if she walked out at all in the neighbourhood during the day; and if she did go out alone for a ramble, he might trust to the chapter of accidents to furnish means for an introduction to her. But then, on the other hand, he reasoned that if a well-dressed, elegant, and aristocratic-looking young gentleman (as he flattered himself to be) were seen lounging and loitering about the fair one's villa, her suspicions would be excited, she would be placed upon her guard, and his projects might be defeated. How then was he to proceed? Suddenly an idea struck him. What if he were to disguise himself in a far humbler apparel than he was wont to wear, and thus pursue his inquiries and researches in the neighbourhood of her abode? The thought delighted him: there was something in the adventure which tickled his fancy; and he fell into a train of reflections perfectly consistent with his miserable narrow-mindedness, frivolity, and self-conceit.

"If I assume a humble garb, and throw myself in her way, she cannot fail to see that there is a certain air of distinction beneath the rough apparel; and she may become interested in me. If I bow to her with the greatest respect and seem to treat her with the utmost deference, she will be pleased; and so I shall succeed in attracting her attention. This little pantomime may last for two or three days, at the end of which she will perhaps speak to me; and so we may form an acquaintance. Then, for another two or three days I can go on thus enchaining her interest more and more; till at last when opportunity serves, I can throw off the mask, announce my lordly rank, proclaim my noble name, and overcome her with the intelligence that it is the head of the house of Saxondale who for her sake put on a humble garb in order to throw himself in her way. She cannot help falling desperately in love with me: and whatever virtue she may possess, will be thawed by so much apparent devotion on my part."

Mightily pleased with the scheme he had thus resolved upon, and the dramatic results to which he had made up his mind it was to lead, Edmund lost no time in putting his most sapient project into execution. It was rather late in the afternoon when he had finally digested all his plan of proceedings; and being Sunday, he did not exactly know where to obtain such a dress as he required. But it struck him that there would be no harm in proceeding at once in his wonted apparel to the neighbourhood of the villa, in order to *reconnoitre* it from a distance. He need not approach near enough to the windows to be noticed in such a way as to endanger future recognition; and at the same time something might be gained and the first step taken by ascertaining the exact whereabouts of the beautiful creature's abode. He accordingly sallied forth; and not choosing to afford any of the domestics the slightest clue as to his proceedings, he did not order either horse or carriage to be prepared for his use on the occasion. Taking a cab from the nearest stand—in spite of his denunciation of street-vehicles in the presence of Mr. Gunthorpe—Lord Saxondale directed himself to be driven to the Seven Sisters' Road; and in about three-quarters of an hour he was set down at the place of destination.

Dismissing the cabman, he walked up the road till he came within sight of the villa which Lord Harold Staunton's valet had described. It was a pretty little cottage-residence, very recently built, and standing about thirty yards back from the road, the intermediate space being occupied by a flower-garden. It had also a garden in the rear of larger extent; and had coach-house and stables attached to the building itself. Several branching evergreens, tastefully arranged, formed a just sufficient screen to prevent passers-by from being able to peer into the ground-floor rooms; and altogether it was a picturesque little dwelling, isolated enough to be quite in the country, and yet not too far from the houses in the Hornsey Road to be altogether lonely.

Having made these observations from a short distance, Lord Saxondale struck into the adjacent fields, so as to ascend a gentle eminence—the same on which *Hornsey Wood Tavern* is situated—and whence he might contemplate at his ease the abode of his charmer. But as he was proceeding thither, he observed a cottage at a little distance, and it occurred to him that he would proceed thither to make some few inquiries relative to the Signora,—such as how long she had lived at the villa, how many servants she kept, and such other matters as he was interested in knowing.

The cottage stood completely away from all the other habitations thinly scattered about in that neighbourhood. It was old, dilapidated, and poverty-stricken,—standing in the midst of a little garden showing but small signs of culture, and surrounded by a low fence broken in many places. On reaching the door, Edmund knocked; and ere the summons was answered he observed that the flimsy blind was partly drawn back from the little window, and some one looked through the dirty panes for an instant. But almost immediately afterwards the door was opened by a woman of not very prepossessing appearance.

She was of middle stature, and seemed about forty-five years of age. Her hair had evidently once been of jetty blackness; but it was now turning with grey. Her features were strongly masculine in their outline, harsh and coarse; her dark eyes shone with an exceeding brightness; and her brows, which were very thick, met above the nose. Her look was alike bold and repulsive; and the lines upon her countenance seemed rather to have been traced by strong passions than to be the wrinkling effects of time. Her apparel was of a humble and sordid description; she had a dirty white cap on her head; and her appearance altogether was negligent and slovenly.

On opening the door the woman said nothing but seemed to wait until the visitor should explain the object of his presence there; but she gazed upon him with mingled astonishment and curiosity, evidently wondering that so well-dressed a young gentleman should have called at her abode. Saxondale himself knew not exactly what to say; for previous to knocking at the door he had prepared in his mind no excuse for stopping at that wretched-looking place. However, being of an effrontery and a self-possession which with such individuals and in such cases often serve the purpose of ready wit, he said in as civil a tone as he could assume, but still with a patronizing kind of air, "My good woman, I have been rambling about here till I am tired; and with your permission will walk in and sit down a little."

"There is *Hornsey Wood Tavern* over yonder," she replied in a harsh voice; "not much more than half a mile distant, and there you can be accommodated better than you can here."

"But I am too tired to walk even that half mile," said the young nobleman. "Besides which, I see a lot of working-class folks all in their Sunday gear, wending their way in that direction, and I can't bear to mingle with such vulgarity."

"And yet you seek out a miserable-looking place like this?" the woman at once answered, fixing her dark eyes keenly upon Lord Saxondale; then as a thought seemed to strike her, inspired perhaps by something which she read upon his countenance, while thus scrutinizing him, she added, "But I suppose you have some object in view? and therefore you can walk in."

Thus speaking, she threw the door wide open, and stood aside for the young nobleman to enter the habitation. It consisted of two rooms on the ground-floor, divided by a little passage, and the same number of rooms above, which were reached by what might by courtesy be termed a flight of stairs but was in reality only a dilapidated ladder. The room into which the woman conducted her visitor, was furnished in the most wretched manner—a crazy table, three or four chairs the rush bottoms of which were broken in, and some few articles of crockery upon a shelf, constituting the principal features of that part of the dwelling. A glance into the other room as he entered, had shown Edmund a scanty bed upon the floor, and one or two chairs almost as useless as those in the room to which he was introduced. The woman appeared to be alone in the house—at least Lord Saxondale saw no other person in either of the two rooms on the ground-floor, nor did he hear any one moving overhead.

"You see the place into which you have invited yourself," said the woman: "but such as it is you are welcome to make it a convenience for resting in. For what other purpose you have sought the

cottage, you will perhaps explain at your leisure:"—and once more she fixed her eyes upon him with a scrutinizing look.

"What makes you think that I have some other purpose in view?" he asked, observing how she gazed at him.

"Because a young gentleman like you," she at once answered, "does not knock at such a place as this without a motive. If you did not choose to mingle with the working-class people that you seem to despise so much, you would have lain down on the dry grass to rest yourself——"

"I see that you are a very shrewd woman indeed," interrupted Edmund, laughing: "and perhaps if I confess that I *had* an object in knocking at your old tumble-down hut, you will not mind giving me the information I want—especially as here is something to oil your tongue for you."

As he thus spoke, he drew forth a well-filled purse, the contents being a portion of the proceeds of Mr. Gunthorpe's cheque; and taking out a sovereign, with true aristocratic indifference in respect to the value of the money, he tossed it into the lap of the woman who had seated herself at a little distance from him.

"Now then, tell me what you want," she said, taking up the coin coldly and leisurely, as if it were by no means so great a godsend as from the poverty of the place one might have supposed it to be.

"That pretty little villa which you see yonder, about three quarters of a mile across the fields—who lives there?" asked Saxondale.

"I do not know her name. It is a young lady——"

"Very beautiful, is she not?"

"Very. I have seen her once or twice, and she struck me as being very beautiful."

"But do you not know who or what she is?" asked Edmund.

"No: I have never had the curiosity to make any inquiries," replied the woman.

"Have you not lived long here? or perhaps I should rather ask whether she has not lived long at that villa?"

"I can answer both questions. In the first place, I have lived here for many years: and in the second place the young lady at Evergreen Villa has only lived there a few weeks—perhaps not more than a month."

"Ah! then it is not surprising you should know nothing about her," observed Edmund. "I think I will go and make inquiries elsewhere:"—and he rose from his seat as he spoke.

"Stop!" said the woman; "you may not be more fortunate in learning elsewhere the particulars you have sought here; but if you like, and are not in a very great hurry for a day or so, I will ascertain everything you want to know. And besides," she added, with another meaning look, "perhaps I may assist you in the design you have in contemplation."

"What design?" demanded Saxondale, sharply, afraid of trusting the woman too far or suffering her to penetrate his views too deeply.

"You must not think I am a fool," she replied, a momentary expression of contempt flitting over her harsh features. "For what earthly reason can a young gentleman like you come making inquiries about a beautiful girl, unless it is that you have an ulterior object in view? In the same way that I saw it was only pretence that made you say you were tired when you knocked at my door, so can I read the motive of your questions relative to the girl at Evergreen Villa."

"Well, at all events there is a bluntness and frankness about you that I like," observed Edmund, who began to think that so shrewd, penetrating, and cunning a woman as this evidently was, might be made a most valuable instrument in the furtherance of his design. "To speak with equal candour, then, I must admit that I do feel a very great interest in the beautiful girl of whom we are talking: and if you will consent to serve me——"

"I have already said that I will," interrupted the woman. "Come now, do not beat about the bush—tell me what you want. I see that you have gold with which you can repay my services; and it's very sure the young lady at Evergreen Villa will not come and bribe me to act against you."

"In the first place," rejoined Saxondale, "you must find out how many servants she keeps—whether she has a maid who, like most of her class, will accept a bribe and enter into my interests——"

"That is a point which may be almost reckoned upon with the fullest confidence," observed the woman. "But go on. What other inquiries am I to make?"

"Whether the fair one goes out for a walk by herself at all—and if so, which direction she usually takes—what her habits are—whether she sees any company or lives retired——"

"In fact, you want to know everything about her," again interrupted the woman, "and to glean all such circumstances as may suggest the plans that you are to adopt. All this I understand at a glance."

"Then I am very certain that I could not have alighted upon a more able assistant," remarked Saxondale. "But I have not altogether explained myself. The truth is, I wish to throw a little spice of romance into this proceeding: for I have the outline of my plan all cut and dried—but as a matter of course the substance of it must be filled up according as circumstances may suggest."

"Now then for the romance part of it?" said the woman interrogatively: and again that transiently contemptuous expression deepened for a moment the lines of her harsh countenance. "Romance is pleasant enough for a fine young gentleman of your age, and perhaps for a sweet young girl such as she is at yon villa; but I question whether my matter-of-fact assistance will not in the long run prove more useful to your aims than all your romance. However, go on."

"What I require is a sort of disguise," answered Saxondale—"the rude dress of a mechanic—not too greasy or dirty, lest it should make me sick——"

"You want gentility in the workman's garb?" interrupted the woman. "Well, if you leave it to me I will procure you that dress to-morrow. I observe your height—you are not very tall—but you are nicely made."

"Yes—I flatter myself," observed Saxondale, caressing his beardless chin, "that I am not altogether amiss."

"On the contrary," said the woman, whose eagle eyes penetrated the frivolous weak-minded young nobleman's wretched conceit and vanity at a single glance, "you are in every respect a

most fit and suitable admirer for such a charming creature as the occupant of Evergreen Villa."

"But you must understand it is not marriage that I mean."

"You need not tell me that. A man who means marriage does not go beating about the bush in such a style as this. You long to possess that girl; and I do not hesitate to declare that you shall succeed."

"Ah! you promise me that?" exclaimed Saxondale, rejoiced at the tone of confidence and the air of assurance with which the woman spoke. "But really, when I look at you, I do recognize a certain superiority about you underneath that poverty-stricken garb——"

"Yes: the superiority of intellect," at once replied the woman: and for a moment she drew herself up haughtily. "I was not always what I now seem. But no matter—we will not touch upon that point. Relative to your own affair, I promise that your aspirations shall be gratified shortly; and in the meantime I will not let the grass grow under my feet. This very evening will I institute the inquiries you have suggested, and such others as I deem it necessary to make; and tomorrow I will procure the mechanic's dress. You shall have everything complete."

"And do you think," asked Saxondale, "that if I took it into my head to stay a week or ten days altogether in this neighbourhood, I could obtain a decent lodging near, so that I might be close at hand to avail myself at any moment of whatsoever circumstances might transpire?"

"I suppose," said the woman, "that if you mean to throw your spice of romance into this love-affair, you could content yourself with rough accommodations for a little while? Because, if so, I could make up a bed here —— Ah! you need not turn up your nose so hastily. When I go into town to-morrow to procure your mechanic's dress, I can get you clean sheets and blankets at the same time, and a new mattress too into the bargain."

"Well, I don't know but what it would be advisable to make preparations for a shake-down upon the floor: and you could get me some refreshments from the tavern yonder. All this will be amusing enough; and when the charming creature comes to know what I have done for her sake——"

"She will of course view you with an interest all the greater," rejoined the woman.

"Then be the arrangements as you suggest," said Lord Saxondale. "Here is the wherewith to increase the comforts of your place and procure the things that I require. It is also an earnest of what my liberality may be, if through your assistance I succeed in the accomplishment of my aims."

Thus speaking, Edmund again drew forth the well-filled purse and tossed ten sovereigns upon the table. The woman did not utter a word of acknowledgement, but deliberately gathered up the coins and dropped then into her pocket. She then asked her visitor at what hour he would return on the morrow.

"When do you think that you will have anything of consequence to tell me?" he asked. "Mind, I am very impatient in this matter; and the sooner it is put in train the better."

"I have already promised that the grass shall not grow under my feet," replied the woman. "If you come up to-morrow evening after dusk, I may perhaps have tidings of a more satisfactory nature to communicate than you are likely to dream of. At all events I will do my best."

"Then I will be here after dusk," rejoined Saxondale, perfectly delighted at the tone of confidence in which the woman spoke and the business-like way in which she treated the whole affair.

He then took his departure, congratulating himself upon having been led by accident to that cottage, where he had found so valuable an agent to assist him in his designs. On retracing his steps towards Holloway, he kept at a prudent distance from Evergreen Villa; and taking the first cab he could find, sped homeward.

CHAPTER XI.

AGAR TOWN.

EVERY one at all acquainted with London knows King's Cross, where until very lately stood the Fever Hospital, behind which was the quarter we are about to describe. But ere entering upon this description, we must observe that the Fever Hospital has been pulled down, and at this present time the principal station of the Great Northern Railway is being built upon the spot. The railway itself, running through the district which is about to occupy our attention, has necessarily led to some innovatory improvements therein: but many of the worst features of that densely populated neighbourhood still exist just as they were in the year 1844, the date of this portion of our tale. At that time Agar Town might be described as a sort of peculiar colony or independent settlement, cut off as it were from the adjacent quarters.

Turning out of the King's Road close by St. Pancras Workhouse, the explorer of that region ascends a narrow rising pathway—passes by a row of wretched little huts, with little pieces of garden, the borders of which are edged with large stones—and continuing his way, is speedily in the midst of a maze of streets and alleys constituting Agar Town. A canal intersects the district: some of the houses overhang the towing-paths, and the little back-yards of others are walled or fenced off on the brink of the cutting through which the stream flows. From the appearance of the place it would seem as if no such things as paving-rates were known there; or if they be, it is a downright robbery to levy them in a quarter where not a bit of pavement is to be seen. Yet the unpaved thoroughfares cannot even be described as roads: for so far from being kept in order, it does not seem as if the slightest trouble had ever been taken to level them. In dry weather it is one succession of little hillocks and holes; so that no vehicle, whether the lightest carriage or the heaviest waggon, could possibly pass along without being jolted to pieces. The impression at once made upon the mind is that of a number of the most wretched huts and hovels built upon a ploughed field, where all the heaps of earth thrown out from the shallow foundations had been left to find a level for themselves as best they could. In very rainy weather these thoroughfares are knee-deep in mud; and then the impression is that of an assemblage of habi-

tations built in the midst of a perfect swamp of mud. Such is Agar Town even to the present day, —the little improvements above alluded to as arising from the formation of the railway, being confined to the springing up of a few cottages of a better description than the old ones, but which being dotted about here and there, only serve to throw the squalor and wretchedness of the surrrounding dwellings into a bolder and more sickening relief.

From all that has just been said, the reader will be able to comprehend that eight years ago, before the formation of the railway in that district, Agar Town must have been one of the lowest, most miserable, and likewise most dangerous regions within the circumference of London. It was indeed the refuge of pauperism—the hiding-place of crime—the abode of wretchedness and squalor—and therefore one of the most prolific hotbeds of demoralization, disease, vice, and profligacy that could be found in the metropolis. Containing but very few shops, and those such as are only to be seen in the poorest neighbourhoods, Agar Town chiefly consisted of lodging-houses, where the avarice of landlords or the poverty of the tenants led to the grouping together of as great a number of occupants as could possibly be squeezed into the smallest imaginable compass. Throughout the whole region the size of the rooms averages about ten or twelve feet square; and at the time of which we are writing, four or five beds, to be occupied by as many different families, were crowded into each room. These beds, consisting only of a wretched flock mattress and a blanket black with grime, were necessarily so close to each other as almost to touch. Thus it might be said that the whole flooring of each room was covered over with bedding as straw is littered down in a stable; and there did several separate families, comprising persons of both sexes and all ages, huddle together beyond the possibility of any regard for modesty or decency. The same horrible system prevails to a great extent in Agar Town at the present day: but at the time of which we are writing, ere the presence of railway workmen introduced some little civilizing improvements into the place, that herding together of whole families was carried to a frightful extent.

In the year 1844 Agar Town was like a morass where the noxious weeds and poisonous plants had attained to the fulness of their rank growth. It was then swarming with human reptiles—the scum, the outcasts, and the rejected of all society. It was under no parochial care, and appeared to be beyond the reach of any civilizing influences. We do no not believe that even the Sunday-morning distributors of tracts, who generally poke their noses everywhere, ventured within the precincts of Agar Town: certainly the parson of no adjacent church ever thought it worth his while to visit the inhabitants of that strange colony, which in every respect was an isolated spot of utter barbarism in the midst of the shining lights of London civilization. It was one of those cesspools into which the moral filth of this modern Babylon regularly and continuously flowed, but which no legislative prudence, nor parochial intervention, nor philanthropic care ever thought of emptying. Having no gas laid on, no street-lamps of any kind, and but very few shops to throw out even the feeble glimmerings of tallow-candles through their dingy panes, Agar Town in dark nights was enveloped in almost utter gloom; and as by the very nature of its few and narrow approaches from the surrounding thoroughfares it stood in the position of a sort of fastness, it necessarily afforded a most convenient asylum for any offender against the law to whom the police might be giving chase in that part of London at the time. Suppose, for example, a thief or other malefactor, disturbed in his depredations anywhere within a small distance of Agar Town,—if he could only manage to keep ahead of his pursuers until he dodged off into that maze of dark and dangerous defiles, he might at once relax his speed, take breath, and congratulate himself upon having reached a place that was as good as a sanctuary.

It must not however be thought that the police never made incursions into Agar Town, because such an impression would be erroneous. What we have meant to convey by the preceding remarks, is that from the peculiarity of its situation and the defile-nature of its approaches, it afforded advantages, or at all events chances of escape for fugitive offenders, which no other low neighbourhood of London could present. Amongst the various scenes of demoralization and depravity which characterized the place, were "penny gaffs,"—or in plain terms penny theatres; and occasionally the police got scent of the existence and the whereabouts of these cheap dramatic representations. Then, perhaps, just at the moment when an audience of the most dissolute and profligate description, including boys and girls of even a very tender age, were enjoying the dozen murders that formed the plot of some terrible tragedy, or devouring in rapt admiration the insane rantings of a banjo-looking *Othello* or a seedy *Hamlet*, the door would burst open, a posse of police rush in, and the whole assemblage of audience and actors be comfortably marched off to the nearest station, to undergo such penalties as the magisterial wisdom might choose to inflict next morning. But these were not the only occasions on which the myrmidons of the law would make an irruption into Agar Town. Now and then they received information that some of those chemical experimentalists termed "illicit distillers" were working a private still in a secluded nook of that isolated region,—for which commerce indeed the whole locality, with the convenience of the canal and barges thereon, was well adapted. Then, in the silence of the night, when the still was in full operation, the abrupt invasion of the police would startle the unlawful experimentalists aforesaid, the genuine product of their industry would be confiscated, and they themselves sent with all the usual circumstances of ignominy to vegetate for a period in prison. But these little variations in the monotony of Agar Town were not of such frequent occurrence as might be expected, considering the almost incessant violations of the law that were taking place in the ways thus specially described.

Such was Agar Town in the year 1844: such too it had been for a long time previous—but at that particular epoch it was in the very height of its ignominious glory and the full blow of its pestilential rankness. There, at the corner of one of the little streets, – if the rough unpaved thoroughfare, defined only by a couple of rows of squalid-looking habitations, could be denominated a street at all,—stood a public-house bearing the sign of the *Billy Goat*,—the same where Ralph Farefield

nineteen years back had been wont to meet Chiffin the Cannibal and his desperate associates. This public-house was altogether of a character such as might be expected in such a region: it was in fact a boozing-ken of the lowest description, where the liquor was as poisonous as the morals of the company that frequented it. It was kept by an old couple called Patch,—the landlord's christian name being Solomon, although it was not clear that he belonged to the Jewish race. These people had thriven and even grown rich in that place, not altogether by the sale of adulterated liquors, but by acting as recipients for the stolen goods brought thither by some of their principal customers. They likewise lent money at usurious interest; and indeed it was proverbial that there was scarcely any means which Solomon Patch would hesitate to adopt in order to increase his gains.

We are now about to introduce our readers into the tap-room of the *Filly Goat*, on the evening of that same Sunday on which Lord Saxondale pursued his inquiries in the neighbourhood of Evergreen Villa, as described in the last chapter. It was about ten o'clock—the shutters were closed—a couple of candles stood upon the table in the tap-room, and the flame of their unsnuffed wicks seemed to burn dimly, like marsh-lights in a mist, through the haze of tobacco-smoke that filled the place. Seven or eight men were seated round the table, with long pipes in their mouths, and with pewter-pots or glasses in front of them. Three or four women were likewise present: and though the company was not very large, yet the noise they made was very great. They seemed all talking at once—some relating anecdotes, others disputing upon mooted points, and others indulging in boisterous shouts of laughter. The characters of all were written upon their countenances. If any one of this motley group had been placed in the dock of the Old Bailey, charged with an offence, no evidence as to respectability of character—even though all the bankers of Lombard Street could, for supposition's sake, be brought forward to give such testimony—would have outweighed with the jury the still more positive evidence of the individual's sinister looks.

At the head of the table sat Chiffin the Cannibal, who by acclamation had been voted into the chair to preside at the orgie. Though nineteen years had fled since we first introduced him to our readers, yet the lapse of time had effected no very striking change in his outward appearance, unless it were to stamp his features still more indelibly than in his younger days with the impress of ferocity and crime. Indeed, it were impossible to conceive a more finished air of ruffianism, or a more consummate aspect of cold-blooded brutality, than this dreadful man presented to the view. His dress was of the same character as that which he was wont to wear when we first spoke of him—namely, a rough shaggy coat, a battered white hat with a rusty black crape twisted round it, corduroy trousers all greasy and stained, dirty stockings, and great clumsy shoes. His inseparable companion, a stout bludgeon, lay before him on the table; and in the depths of his capacious pockets were a couple of pistols, which he constantly kept loaded. Of all the company present—good heaven! such a company as it was—he alone abstained from much talking or uproarious noise,—his habit being rather of that sullen reserve which usually belongs to the cruel and cold-blooded disposition. At the same time, he by no means discountenanced the hideous mirth and horrible hilarity that were going on around; and from time to time he expressed his approval of some obscene anecdote or desperate exploit by a grim smile, which enhanced rather than relaxed the dark ruffianism of his features.

It was when the mirth and jollity were at their highest, that the trampling of a horse's hoofs suddenly approaching, and then stopping at the door of the public-house, reached the ears of the revellers in the tap-room; and one of the women exclaimed, "There's Lady Bess!"

"Oh! then she's sure to order us a bowl of punch," cried another of the females, clapping her hands joyfully. "Lady Bess always flashes her money about when she comes amongst us."

"Yes—*when* she does," growled Chiffin the Cannibal, in a deep bass voice that had something cavern-like and sepulchral in its tones; "but how often is it that she *does* come? She's a deuced sight too proud to suit me."

"Ah! but if she's proud she's so generous," at once rejoined the first female who had spoken.

Chiffin was about to make some farther observation, when the door opened and in walked a person who at first sight would have been taken for one of the male sex, but whom on a nearer survey it was not very difficult to discover to be a woman in man's apparel. For a female, she was of a commanding height, being at least five feet ten inches, and was remarkably though somewhat coarsely handsome. Her features were large but regular: her complexion was of a clear olive, and had the flush of excitement upon her cheeks. Her eyes were large, of the deepest black, and strangely bright: they had an exceeding boldness in their glance, and could look any one full in the face—not frankly, but with a hardihood and audacity altogether unbecoming her sex. Yet her look was not that of wanton impudence nor of lustful passion, because it was fixed just the same upon every one who came for the first time within its reach—whether male or female, handsome or ugly, old or young:—it was a look, in short, which seemed meant to penetrate whatever disguise the object of its scrutiny might wear or whatever thoughts were passing in the depths of the soul. It was a strange and overbearing look—not only scrutinizing, but also full of a bold defiance, and as much as to say that though the possessor of those large dark eyes was a woman in sex, yet that she was a man in daring and in dauntlessness.

Without being at all inclined to stoutness, her figure was largely and finely made—upright as the form of an amazon, without the slightest appearance of that gentle inclination or stoop of the shoulders which belongs to feminine grace, and with an elevated carriage of the head which completed her erect appearance. She was dressed in a handsome frock-coat, buttoned round the waist, but open at the bosom, so as to display the fine cambric shirt-front and the exquisite frill. This frill, by occupying as it were the interval between the swell of the bosoms, concealed their fullness and thus aided the general effects of the apparel in giving a masculine air to the female wearer. The edges of a figured silk waistcoat

were seen under the lappels of her coat: she wore a stand-up shirt collar, and had a shawl neckerchief tied with a care that Beau Brummel might have envied. She had on black pantaloons; and possessing a remarkable straightness and evident symmetry of limbs, that portion of her masculine garb became her admirably. Patent-leather boots, the brilliant gloss of which even now shone brightly through the dust that was upon them, set off her long narrow feet to great advantage; and the clinking spurs gave her a sort of semi-military appearance. Her hair which was of raven blackness, appeared when she took off her hat to be combed back from the high and open forehead, and though not worn very long, fell in rich and natural waves over her ears and to the lower edge of the collar of the coat, so that in fact it was not longer than the hair of many fashionable youths at the West End of London. She wore a pair of delicate buckskin gloves, and carried a handsome riding-whip in her hand.

We have already said that this woman's features, though exceedingly handsome, were largely chiselled and somewhat coarse. This was especially observed in the mouth, the lips being full, yet not with that sweet pouting expression which gives a charm to such fullness of lips in woman. Of a rich and moist red, they were not merely luscious but strongly sensual lips; yet when parted they revealed teeth faultlessly even and white as ivory. When first casting the eye upon her, and ere the delusion as to her sex was thoroughly cleared up, the absence of beard or whisker was not immediately noticed in consequence of the olive duskiness of her complexion, which gave her a masculine air: and then too that bold and hardy gaze which she invariably fixed upon any stranger the moment she encountered one, likewise tended to sustain the idea of the sex whose apparel she had assumed. Her age might be about twenty-five or twenty-six; but when considered in her male apparel, she at once struck the beholder as being a young man of one-and-twenty. When she spoke, it was in a voice that was strong without being coarse or harsh; it had all that flute-like power of tone which was also calculated to deceive the observer as to her real sex and sustain the delusion. Who or what she was will hereafter transpire in due course: but at present we can only introduce her to the reader as Lady Bess.

On entering the wretched tap-room an expression of disgust flitted across her features: but almost instantaneously throwing aside that look, she said with a careless smile and in an off-hand manner, "Well, you are all deep in your orgie. I suppose it began ere sunset and will last till at least sunrise?"

"Will you sit down and join us?" asked Chiffin the Cannibal.

"No—I have not time," responded Lady Bess, beating one of her legs negligently with the horsewhip as she surveyed the group through the haze of tobacco-smoke.

"You never have time," growled Chiffin in a surly manner.

"But I have had time, though, to do you a service," immediately rejoined Lady Bess: "and when you had just recovered from a long illness I gave you assistance in the hour of your need. I have never asked it back again—I have never wanted it—I would not take it even were it offered: but what I do look for, is civility in return."

"Lady Bess is right!" exclaimed several voices, all the females joining in without exception

"Come, we will have no disputing," said the amazonian beauty: then opening the door, she cried out, "Solomon! Where is that scoundrel old Solomon?"

"Here I be, my lady," answered a fawning obsequious voice from behind the bar outside. "What's your ladyship's orders? Bill's holding your ladyship's horse——"

"A truce to so many ladyships," exclaimed the woman in male attire; "and bring in two crown bowls of punch: and then bid your old wife prepare such supper as her larder affords—and charge the whole to me."

"There! didn't I say her ladyship would come down handsome?" cried the female who had previously predicted the regale of punch that had just been ordered. "But wouldn't it be a greater treat still if Lady Bess would sit down and drink it with us?"

"To be sure! to be sure!" cried many voices.

"But while thanking you for the compliment," said Lady Bess, "I have already told you that I have no time. Now, who is there here that will do me a service?—I mean amongst the men—for it is a message that I wish to send."

Several of the male revellers volunteered; and Lady Bess sweeping her bright eyes over them, as if to select the one whom she most fancied for the purpose, said, "I choose you, Tony Wilkins."

The individual to whom she thus addressed herself, was a young man of not more than three or four-and-twenty, but whose looks fell very little short of those of any of his companions in their sinister expression and evil nature. He was clad in a squalid garb, and his appearance altogether was such that it seemed scarcely credible any person in his senses would have trusted him out of sight to get change for even half-a-crown. Yet it appeared that Lady Bess knew her man, and saw something in him which convinced her that he would faithfully execute her commission. This surmise on her part seemed fully corroborated by the zeal with which he had at first volunteered, and the evident pleasure with which he found himself the select object of her choice.

"Now, Tony," continued Lady Bess, drawing forth a small sealed packet from her pocket, "you must take this, and run as hard as you can down to King's Cross. There you will see a tall gentleman enveloped in a cloak, and with his hat slouched over his features. He will be lounging about near the statue. You must accost him, and say, '*The night is dark.*' He will answer, '*But it can be made brighter.*' If he gives you this reply you will at once thrust the little packet into his hand and speed off instantaneously. But should he not give that reply, you will know he is not the individual whom you seek; and you must look out for another answering the description I have given. However, as it is not likely on this warm summer night that any individual, unless for a particular purpose, would wrap himself up in a cloak, it is next to certain that the first whom you meet thus muffled, will be the one for whom the packet is destined. Having performed your commission, you can come back and enjoy your share of the supper I have ordered,

and here is a guinea to indemnify you for your loss of so much of the punch as will be disposed of in your absence."

Tony Wilkins promised to acquit himself faithfully of his errand; and taking the little parcel he secured in the pocket of the greasy coat that hung loose about his person. He then stuck a battered hat upon his head, and was about to hurry forth, when Lady Bess stopped him for a moment,—saying, "I do not question your honesty towards me, Tony, because I know that all of you here would do me a service if you could—yes, even Chiffin who growled at me just now:"—and as she spoke she bent her eyes with a perfect blaze of lustre upon the Cannibal, who evidently shrank from their overawing power. "But still I may as well hint, Tony," she continued, again turning round towards her messenger, "that there is nothing in the packet of any value to a soul save the individual into whose hands you are to give it; and therefore if the devil should tempt you, it will not be worth your while to sneak out of your way and open it in the expectation of finding money or bank-notes."

"I wouldn't do it—I wouldn't do it," answered Tony Wilkins, with an air of sincerity which for an instant rose dominant above the sinister expression of his countenance; and without another word he darted away.

The old landlord and his wife now made their appearance with the two steaming bowls of punch; and when they were placed upon the table, Lady Bess filled a wine-glass, saying, "I drink success to you all. Come, Chiffin, I am determined to put you into a good humour, and you shall pledge me in a glass."

"Well, I don't know how it is, but you make us all do just as you like, Lady Bess," said the Cannibal, half good-humouredly and half-sullenly. "You've got a power over us—I suppose it is because you are so superior to the general run of us folks——"

"Never mind what is the reason," exclaimed the amazonian lady, laughing. "Drink your punch, Chiffin, and do try to look good-natured for once."

The Cannibal, as if obeying a sort of magical influence which he could not resist, did as he was ordered; and as he put down the emptied glass he smacked his lips, while a grim smile expanded completely over his hang-dog countenance, as he said, "I do really think that if I saw anybody trying to do you an injury, Lady Bess, I should give them six inches of my clasp-knife, even though I swung for it."

"Well, it may be useful to have such a champion as you, Chiffin," exclaimed the dashing lady, with a merry laugh which displayed her ivory teeth to the utmost advantage. "But now I must be off."

"Will you not wait," inquired one of the women, "to see if Tony comes back all right?"

"I know he will," replied Lady Bess. "He is one of the greatest scamps amongst you and therefore the best to be trusted. And now good night."

With these words she quitted the room—paused at the bar outside to pay for all she had ordered—and then issuing forth, mounted her steed which the pot-boy was holding. It was a splendid animal, of dark chesnut colour, with a proudly arching neck, and of Arabian fineness of limb. Lady Bess tossed the pot-boy half-a-crown, and then gently walked the noble animal, which she bestrode with the most perfect experience, over the rough uneven road till she emerged from Agar Town; and entering Maiden Lane, galloped away in the the direction of the country.

In about a quarter of an hour after her departure, Tony Wilkins returned to the tap-room of the *Billy Goat;* and to the inquiring look which his friends, both male and female, flung upon him, he answered, "It's all right. I met the gen'leman in the cloak: he give the watchwords—and so I gived him the packet."

"What sort of a looking feller was he?" asked one of the women.

"I'm blowed if I could see his face," replied Tony: "he took precious good care of that. But he was tall and dressed like a reg'lar gen'leman."

"Perhaps he's Lady Bess's lover?" suggested another of the women.

"Lover indeed!" growled Chiffin, contemptuously: "I don't think such a woman as Lady Bess knows what love is. She's altogether above common things——In short she's a strange creature, and I'm hanged if I can half understand her. Since first——"

The Cannibal's observations were here interrupted by the opening of the tap-room door, and the entrance of a woman who was at once welcomed by all present and saluted by the name of Madge Somers. She was between forty and fifty years of age, had very harsh features, and dark hair turning grey. She wore an old cloak, the hood of which was drawn partly over her head, but not so much as to conceal a dingy white cap with great frills very much tumbled, as if she were wont to sleep in it at night as well as wear it in the day-time.

"Well, Madge, what's brought you here just now?" asked Chiffin.

"To speak to you," was the response. "Something has turned up to-day that promises a harvest: so I want you to help me to reap it."

"Well, you sha'n't have to ask twice. But are we to talk it over now?"

"Yes—at once; because I want to be getting back homeward:"—and the woman, who had not sat down, beckoned Chiffin to follow her from the room.

He did so—and they ascended to a private apartment on the upper floor, where they remained together for half-an-hour in earnest conversation. At the end of this interview Madge Somers took her departure from the *Billy Goat*, while Chiffin the Cannibal rejoined his companions in the tap-room to partake of the supper for which Lady Bess had paid.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COTTAGE AGAIN.

It was about nine o'clock on the following evening, when Lord Saxondale, in pursuance of the appointment he had made with the woman at the cottage, knocked at the door of that lonesome habitation. His summons was at once answered by the woman herself; and he was admitted into the same sordid little room where he had held his conference with

her on the previous day. A single candle was burning upon the table, but so dimly that it made the place look so gloomy as at first to send a very unpleasant sensation thrilling through the entire form of the young nobleman.

"Well, what news?" he hastened to demand, fixing his eyes upon the woman.

"I told you that I should have some favourable intelligence to report," she at once answered. "But sit down and listen to me."

Saxondale had been drinking pretty freely, according to his wont, ere he quitted the dining-table to keep his present appointment; and his transient fears at finding himself in that gloomy-looking place, now vanished in a moment. He accordingly sat down, already inspired with hope and rekindling passion at the encouraging words which the woman had uttered.

"Last evening," she resumed, "I managed to get into conversation with the lady's-maid down at Evergreen Villa; and finding that she was naturally talkative, I began to draw her out. Without telling you everything that took place, or how I wormed myself into her confidence, I may at once proceed to state that I told her how an elegant and rich young gentleman was very desperately in love with her mistress. The lady's-maid grew deeply interested on hearing this: for she no doubt at once saw a rich harvest of bribes for herself. So we pretty soon began to understand each other. She told me that her mistress belongs to the Opera——"

"To be sure—I knew that already," exclaimed Saxondale. "But still I am glad to find the thing confirmed in this way, and that it is really she who does live there; so that there can be no mistake about it. But go on. What next did the maid tell you about her charming mistress?"

"In the first place, that she sees very little company," continued the woman,—"only a few friends connected with the Opera; that she regularly walks

out in the fields every morning when it is fine, immediately after breakfast—sometimes alone, but generally attended by her maid——"

"Ah! and at what o'clock is that?" demanded Saxondale impatiently.

"Between nine and ten o'clock," replied the woman; "quite in the cool of the morning."

"Capital!" ejaculated Edmund. "I will throw myself in the way of my fair one to-morrow. Have you got the disguise?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes—here it is," responded the woman, as she pointed to a large brown paper parcel. "The maid is already initiated with respect to your intentions, and she will not fail to draw the notice of her young mistress to you in your mechanic's dress. Oh! I warrant you she will know how to manage the thing cleverly enough, bidding her mistress observe what a genteel, elegant-looking young fellow it is for a working man——"

"Nothing can be better!" exclaimed Saxondale, rubbing his hands together joyfully with the anticipations of success. "I tell you what I think I shall do—I shall go up to the tavern, pass the night there, and come back here early in the morning to put on the artizan dress——"

"And stand the risk of being recognized by the people of the tavern," interrupted the woman, "so that it will get spread all over the place like wildfire, that there's a young gentleman going about sometimes in the clothing suitable to his station, and at others in a humble garb. Thus you will be watched, and dogged, and have all your motions pryed into—so that all hope of carrying out your romantic plan will be effectually destroyed."

"You are right, my worthy monitress," observed Edmund. "I must do nothing foolish to mar the plot."

"Besides," she immediately continued, "I had a room up-stairs all nicely cleaned out for you to-day and put into the best possible order. There's a comfortable bed that I bought—a washing-stand—and everything requisite, though in a humble way. It's true the bed is upon the floor, as there was no time to get a bedstead put up—and besides I did not like to make too many preparations for fear of attracting notice."

"Enough," my good woman!" exclaimed Saxondale. "I had forgotten at the moment our understanding of yesterday afternoon, that I was to have a shake-down bed here. At all events I can try it for one night."

"And then," added the woman, "if you feel yourself uncomfortable, you might take some little obscure lodging in the village, passing yourself off as a mechanic."

"To be sure!" cried Saxondale: "your advice is in all repects excellent. It shall be as you say: and now, as the night is remarkably fine, I will just take a stroll for half-an-hour, smoke a cigar in the fields, and then on my return go to bed. I suppose you have got such a thing as a drop of spirits in the house?—for wine is not to be thought of here."

"On the contrary," said the woman, "I have done my best to make you as comfortable as I can:" —then opening a cupboard and taking forth three bottles, she said, "I brought these with me in my basket from town to-day."

She likewise produced a corkscrew, some glasses (evidently newly purchased), and a jug of fresh water. Saxondale uncorked the bottles and tasted their contents one after another: then repudiating the wine, he mixed himself a tumbler of brandy-and-water. This he quickly imbibed, and then lighting his cigar, strolled forth from the cottage. For about three quarters of an hour he sauntered through the fields, enjoying the fragrance of his havannah in the calm freshness of the evening, and thinking over the brilliant conquest he felt certain of achieving. It was about half-past ten when he returned to the hut, where he was immediately admitted by the woman; and on being again conducted into her little room, he found the table spread with a clean napkin, and a little supper consisting of a cold fowl, a lobster, a new loaf, and some bottled porter, arranged upon the board. Everything looked perfectly clean, notwithstanding the sordid appearance of the place itself and the untidy aspect of the woman. The walk had given the young nobleman an appetite—the romantic adventure, as he considered it, had put him into good spirits—and so he sat down and did justice to the fare. Another tumbler of brandy-and-water exhilarated his spirits still more; and when he had thus concluded his repast, he felt every inclination to retire to rest, so that he might rise early in the morning and prepare for the "love campaign," as he called it.

"I do not know," said the woman, as she lighted another candle ere conducting him to the chamber up-stairs, "whether it is an oversight on your part, or whether you have purposely forborne from telling me who you are. If you desire to keep your name secret, of course I do not wish to know: it cannot be any business of mine. But if otherwise, and you have no reason for hiding your name, you may as well tell it to me."

"I have not the slightest objection," answered the young nobleman, "because I have every reason to believe that you are as discreet as you are astute. I am Lord Saxondale."

"I felt convinced you were a young gentleman of rank," said the woman; "and I told the lady's-maid so last night. And now excuse me for hinting that it will be as well to give the complaisant abigail a bribe as early as possible; and if you like, I can manage to see her the very first thing in the morning before she accompanies her mistress in her walk."

"Oh, to be sure!" exclaimed Saxondale. "By all means put the lady's-maid in a good humour:"—and as he thus spoke he drew forth his purse which had a quantity of gold in one end and several bank-notes in the other. "Here, give her this note," he continued, selecting one for ten pounds. "But, no—gold is better. The fair sex always prefer gold. So you shall present her with these ten sovereigns as an earnest of still more liberal rewards:"—and he tossed the money down upon the table.

"The maid shall have this before eight o'clock to-morrow morning," said the woman.

"I see that you will not let the grass grow under your feet," observed Saxondale, with a smile. "And now for this room where I am to sleep. But, by the bye, let us take up the garb in which I am to appear to-morrow."

"Your lordship would embellish even the most wretched rags," said the woman, knowing how to flatter him; "and therefore you cannot possibly look otherwise than well, even in this rough suit."

Thus speaking, she took the bundle in one hand and the candle in the other, and led the way up the ricketty ladder-like staircase to the storey above. There she introduced Lord Saxondale into a room the wretched appearance of which contrasted strangely with the splendidly furnished chamber to which he was accustomed at home. Still was it evident that all attempts had been made to render it as habitable as possible. A quantity of hay, having a very fragrant odour, had been thickly spread upon the floor; and on this the mattrass was placed. It was quite new, as were also the sheets and blankets. Nevertheless Lord Saxondale made a somewhat wry face as he inspected these accommodations; and he was about to remark that although they would do for one night, yet he could not put up with them for a longer period,—when it struck him that he had better not risk the chance of offending a woman who not only seemed to enter heart and soul into his projects, but who had likewise done the best she could to make him comfortable. Suppressing therefore any display of ill-humour, he allowed his features to brighten up, and even laughed as he exclaimed, "Only think of the descendants of a family dating its origin back to the time of the Tudors, plunging headlong into such an adventure as this!"

"The little hardships which you thus endure, my lord," replied the woman, "should be considered as adding to the romance of the whole adventure."

"True!" cried Saxondale: "that is at least a consolation. And now open the parcel and put out my rough garments in readiness for me to assume in the morning."

The woman accordingly placed the mechanic's garb upon a chair near the humble bed, and leaving the candle on the washing-stand, bade her guest "good night." As soon as she had left the room, Saxondale disapparelled himself and lay down to rest. Being much wearied, he did not find the bed altogether so uncomfortable as he had anticipated; and while in the midst of imagination's revels respecting the transcendant beauties of Angela Vivaldi, he soon sank off into a profound sleep.

It was about midnight when the woman, who had not yet retired to rest, put on her old ragged cloak, and drawing the hood over her head, stole very gently forth from the hut. Traversing the field, she looked about her as she neared the hedge that formed its boundary; and in a few moments, from the dark shade thereof the form of a man emerged into the clear starlight.

"Well, Madge, is it all right?" said Chiffin the Cannibal: for he the individual was.

"All right," she answered. "The young fellow is fast asleep. I stole up to the door of his room ten minutes back, and could hear by his measured respiration that he was in a deep slumber."

"And what about the booty?" demanded Chiffin. "Is the game worth all this trouble?"

"Shall you be content with a hundred pounds or so, for your share?" inquired the woman, as she recrossed the field, accompanied by the Cannibal, in the direction of the cottage.

"I believe you, old gal. But have you made sure?"

"I told you last night at the *Billy Goat*," responded Madge Somers, "that the jewellery he wears about his person is worth a good fifty pounds, even in the way that we shall have to sell it. Solomon Patch will give that sum: for to buy it in the shops it would cost three times as much. There's his watch and chain, diamond studs, and three beautiful rings on his fingers. Then his purse is well lined, I know; for I managed to make him pull it out, so that I might judge of its contents. There's a lot of gold in one end, and ever so many bank-notes in the other. I caught a glimpse of a fifty and a twenty; and there are others besides, the amount of which I could not catch at a glance."

"Well, this looks promising," remarked the Cannibal, grasping his club with a firmer gripe. "I've got all my tools about me," he added with a diabolic leer,—"pistols, clasp-knife, and so on. But what about the shovel to dig the grave?"

"I have not forgotten it," responded Madge: "it is there, at the hut. I procured it along with the other things in town this morning. And I'll tell you, moreover, what I have done——I have made his bed upon a thick layer of hay——"

"I understand," exclaimed Chiffin: "to save the floor from the blood when we draw a knife across his throat or stick a dagger into him—eh? Well, it's a good precaution: there's nothing so dangerous as blood-marks—for I've heard say they can't be washed out. But have you ascertained who the young spark is?"

"Suppose he is a lord—should you flinch?" asked the woman.

"Flinch!" repeated the Cannibal, with savage contempt; "why should I? What the deuce is a lord to me?"

"To be sure—what indeed?" said the woman. "Well then, this young blade is Lord Saxondale."

"Lord Saxondale!" exclaimed Chiffin in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the woman, struck by her companion's manner, which she was evidently at a loss to comprehend. "Do you know anything of him?—why did you seem so surprised at the mention of his name?"

"Only because I once had something to do in connexion with that there family," replied Chiffin. "But that was nineteen or twenty years ago and then my services was engaged by a chap named Farefield. However, all that's gone and done; and if there's money to be got here to-night, I don't care what the young fellow's name is."

By the time this colloquy was ended, Madge Somers and the Cannibal had reached the door of the cottage; and the woman gently lifting the latch, passed into the place, followed by her male companion. She then shut the door again with equal caution, while the Cannibal, who seemed perfectly familiar with the habitation, at once entered the ground-floor room, where the food, wine, and spirits still remained upon the table. The night air had sharpened his appetite; and without a moment's hesitation he sat down and began making a hearty meal, not forgetting to pay his respects to the brandy-bottle, wine being no favourite beverage with him. He did not take above ten minutes thus to satisfy his appetite, which the idea of the horrible crime he had come thither to perpetrate by no means marred, while the fiery alchohol added if possible to the ferocious ruffianism of his mood.

"Now," said the woman, who, without taking off her cloak, had seated herself and remained perfectly

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silent while her companion was eating, "let us not lose another moment——for the body must be disposed of before morning," she added in a very low voice.

With these word she approached the cupboard and took forth a dagger, the point of which she tried with one of her fingers.

"You mean to play your part in it, then," said the Cannibal in a whisper and with a grim look.

"What matters it who does the work?" she demanded. "We are neither of us squeamish, I suppose. But in case he should happen to awake as we enter the room, and either cry out or offer any resistance, it will be better for us both to be prepared."

"All right!" observed Chiffin. "And now to business."

Madge Somers took up the candle with her left hand, and holding the dagger in her right, led the way from the room. As noiselessly as possible did she ascend the steps, with Chiffin close at her heels. On reaching the door of Saxondale's chamber, they stopped and listened; and the regular and even respiration of the young nobleman convinced them that he still slept profoundly. They accordingly opened the door and stole in. Madge, who led the way, advanced straight up to the bed; and as the flaring candle which she held in her hand threw its light upon the countenance of Edmund, both she and her murderous companion saw, as they suspected, that he was wrapped in the profoundest slumber. But just as they were about to do the work of death, a sudden ejaculation of mingled horror and amazement burst from the lips of Madge Somers; and dropping the candle in the fearful excitement which had so abruptly and strangely seized upon her, the chamber was plunged into darkness.

That ejaculation to which she gave vent and the noise of the candlestick falling, startled young Saxondale with galvanic effect from his slumbers; and springing up from the mattrass, he cried out "Thieves! murder!" as loudly as he could vociferate.

Madge Somers, recovering her presence of mind the very instant she had dropped the candle, clutched Chiffin with nervous violence by the arm: and in a quick but low whisper said, "Go!" The ruffian, astounded at what had just happened,—but having not a moment for reflection, and being too much bewildered to act of his own accord,—at once obeyed the woman's command, for which it no doubt struck him there must be some good and excellent reason. She at the same time banged the door violently behind him as if to enforce with additional energy the order she had given for his retreat; and then hastening towards Saxondale, who had begun vociferating as ere now described, she said, "Hold your tongue! it is nothing!"

"But that noise—what was it?" asked Edmund, quaking and quivering all over. "For God's sake don't hurt me! Take my purse, if you want it—but—but——" and his teeth chattered audibly.

"I tell you that you have nothing to fear," exclaimed Madge Somers. "I would not hurt you—and I do not want your purse."

"But what has happened? what is the disturbance?" inquired Edmund, still with tremulous voice and quivering limbs, as he stood upright by the side of the bed from which he had leaped. "Tell me—what are you doing here?—what noise was that? Did I not see something glitter in your hand?"

"No—nothing——only the candlestick that I dropped," at once replied Madge, who had already concealed the dagger under her cloak.

But here we should observe that although the light had been extinguished by the fall of the candle, yet the room was not enveloped in total obscurity; for the glimmering of the starlight through the small and dingy window rendered objects somewhat discernible: therefore the young nobleman could perceive the figure of the woman standing near him; and observing that she was not undressed, naturally argued that she had not been in bed at all. But he likewise perceived that she had no one with her, and this latter circumstance somewhat reassured him.

"It was only a drunken man who would force his way into the house," continued Madge. "But make haste and dress yourself! You must go away from this place at once. Ask me no questions—and do as I tell you without delay. You must manage to resume your apparel in the dark; and in a few minutes I will come up to you again. But fear nothing, I repeat: no harm shall befall you."

Then, snatching up the candlestick, and without waiting for a reply,—much less to answer any of the questions which the young nobleman might think fit to put relative to all these singular proceedings—she abruptly quitted the room, closing the door behind her. On descending the ladder-stairs she found Chiffin waiting below with eager impatience to learn the cause of those sudden emotions on her part which had not merely made her cry out and drop the candle, but also abandon all in a moment the murderous intent that had been harboured against her guest.

Having hastily lighted the candle again, in the room where the supper-things were, she said in a low but resolute tone, "Remain you here quietly, and I will explain everything. I cannot tell you now—but when he is safe out of the house——"

"What?" asked Chiffin, his countenance becoming as dark as night: "do you mean that he is to escape us?"

"Yes—I do mean so," returned the woman, in whose looks there was a strange firmness mingled with a sort of wild agitation. "You have known me well enough, Chiffin—and I should think too well not to be aware that I am acting for the best."

"Well, it may be so," growled the Cannibal, savagely; "but it seems a strange way of doing things."

"It is nevertheless *my* way," rejoined Madge, with a still more dogged air of determination. "So sit down—take some brandy to put you into a better humour—and wait till I return. I shall be with you again in three or four minutes. Here, lend me the candle—you can manage for yourself in the dark till I come back."

Having thus spoken, Madge Somers took up the candle and left the room, closing the door behind her.

Meanwhile Edmund, considerably relieved from his terrors by the assurances of safety which the woman had given him—but thoroughly bewildered

by the strangeness of the whole proceeding—had lost no time in resuming his apparel; and he had scarcely dressed himself when she re-appeared with a light in her hand. He immediately fixed his eyes upon her to see whether she came with any hostile intent; and though there was certainly little to glean of an encouraging character from a countenance naturally sinister and repulsive, yet at the same time he beheld naught in her looks to belie the assurances of safety she had ere now given him. She nevertheless gazed upon him with a singular earnestness, that had however nothing threatening in it: and yet her regards were of a nature which he could not comprehend.

"You doubtless wish for explanations why you must depart so abruptly and in the middle of the night," she said, at length breaking silence, and speaking in that curt, blunt, and imperious manner which seemed habitual to her: "but you will receive none from my lips. It suits me to act in this way. But there is one point on which I may as well enlighten you at once—which is, that all I told you about my having seen or spoken to the lady's-maid at Evergreen Villa is pure invention on my part. I never took any trouble at all in the matter, and know nothing more of the young lady or her concerns than what I told you yesterday when you first came to the cottage. And now depart."

"But this is most singular—most unaccountable!" exclaimed Saxondale, his courage reviving in proportion as he saw that there was actually no ground for alarm.

"Depart, I say!" cried Madge Somers, stamping her foot impatiently. "If you stayed here for an hour, you would not drag from my lips a single word more than I choose to tell you."

Lord Saxondale, perceiving that it was utterly useless to stand arguing the point with this singular woman, no longer hesitated to obey her command; and he accordingly followed her from the room. She descended the stairs with the candle in her hand, and held open the cottage-door, her entire manner evincing an unaccountable impatience for him to begone. He accordingly went forth without another word; and speeding across the fields, entered the Seven Sisters Road.

Meanwhile Madge Somers closed the front door and returned to her companion Chiffin, whom she found seated near the table and drinking large draughts of brandy-and-water, to which he had managed to help himself by aid of the glimmering light that peeped in through the window.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GLANCE AT THE PAST.

Whatever intention Madge Somers might have had a few minutes back, of entering into full particulars with Chiffin the Cannibal as to the cause of her singular behaviour towards Lord Saxondale, she had come to a very opposite resolution by the time she returned to him. In short, for reasons best known to herself, she had entirely changed her mind, and determined to keep her own counsel. At the same time there were certain particulars to which he had briefly alluded when they were crossing the field together, and respecting which she was anxious to obtain the fullest and completest explanations. Madge Somers therefore felt that she had a difficult game to play with the formidable Chiffin, and that it would require all her arts of diplomacy to effect the double object of satisfying him in respect to her own conduct, and at the same time gleaning what she wanted to know from his lips.

"You are enjoying yourself," she said, flinging off her old cloak and sitting down near the table.

"Well, I think it wants something to put one in a good humour after this disappointment," growled the Cannibal. "But it wasn't for a glass of brandy-and-water that I came up here to-night, I can tell you," he added. "Who's to pay me the hundred pounds I have just lost by your silly nonsense in letting that young fellow go? For I hav'n't forgot that you said just now my share would come to that amount."

"Now, Chiffin," answered Madge Somers, "you have known me some years, and I have never deceived you in business matters—have I?"

"No—I can't say that you have," responded the Cannibal sullenly. "We have done a few things together, and you have always been fair and straightforward enough—there's no denying that: and now, what next?"

"You will believe me, then, if I make you a certain promise?" said Madge interrogatively.

"Yes—I think I may," replied Chiffin: "for we all know you are a strange kind of a creature, and there's some of the folks down at Sol Patch's really fancies you are a witch. I don't mean no offence, Madge——"

"Witches need not have recourse to the means I adopt for a living," rejoined the woman abruptly. "But about this promise of mine. If I tell you that to-morrow evening at nine o'clock I will bring you a hundred pounds to the *Billy Goat*, or any where else you choose to appoint, will you be satisfied for the loss of your booty this night? And I think you ought to be," she added ere he had time to answer; "for it will be a hundred pounds earned by you without risk, whereas if this work had been done to-night there would have been risk, although everything was so nicely arranged to make all traces disappear."

"Well, if I was sure of having the blunt to-morrow night," said Chiffin, slowly suffering himself to be pacified, "I shouldn't care much about that young fellow being allowed to walk clean off under my very nose, as one may say."

"Then you shall have the hundred pounds to-morrow night, Chiffin," said Madge Somers, with the confidence of one who knows that the promise will be fulfilled.

"And now you will tell me," asked the Cannibal, "what the deuce all this means—why you dropped the candle and called out—why you pushed me from the room and banged the door as a signal that I wasn't wanted—and why you let the young chap escape at all."

"Did you not see that he opened his eyes all in a moment, just as we were bending over the bed?" asked Madge.

"No—that I didn't!" replied Chiffin gruffly; "and if he did open his eyes like that, then all I

can say is I can't believe mine—because it seemed to me that he was asleep as sound as a rock."

"Well, then," rejoined Madge doggedly, "I can tell you that he did. I was closest to him and I saw him open his eyes."

"And suppose he did," exclaimed Chiffin, "what then? why did that prevent us from doing his business?"

"I don't know how it was, but a sudden weakness came upon me," answered Madge. "I could not find it in my heart——"

"Oh! that be hanged!" growled Chiffin, "I don't believe it for a minute—it's all nonsense. A sudden weakness over you, Madge? Why, you must take me for a downright fool——"

"Never mind what I take you for, Chiffin," interrupted the woman, with a look and manner which showed that she was not to be frightened by him: "I tell you that some strange feeling of remorse, or pity, or fear—I dont know which it was—but perhaps all three united—came over me at the time, and I could not possibly do the deed or yet let it be done. It seemed as if an invisible hand was stretched out to save him——"

"Well, I don't know what to think of it," observed Chiffin sullenly: "it's a strange story, Madge, to come from your lips."

"And I am a strange woman too—am I not?" she demanded abruptly. "You yourself said so just now."

"And so you are—and it's perhaps on that account you suddenly took it into your queer head to let the young fellow go. Well," he continued, refilling his glass with brandy-and-water, "I suppose what you say must be the case; and if you only keep your word and come down with the blunt to-morrow night, I shan't bother myself any longer about your strange conduct of just now."

"You may rely upon my punctuality," said Madge. "At nine o'clock I will be in Agar Town. But while we were crossing the field, you said something about having done business for one of the Saxondale family several years ago."

"And so I did," answered Chiffin; "and now I recollect, it was just about this time nineteen years back. But it wasn't exactly for any one bearing the name of Saxondale—the old lord was alive then—and this covey who was here to-night was only just born."

"I recollect you mentioned the name of a person called Farefield," said Madge.

"Yes—Ralph Farefield," rejoined Chiffin: "it was him that employed me. Ah! it is a rum affair altogether, and I never could make out how that Ralph Farefield came by his death."

"A strange affair, was it?" said Madge Somers. "Come, Chiffin, your glass is empty; and although it's late you are accustomed to sit up, and we may as well have a friendly chat while we are about it. Besides, I mean to have a glass myself. So come, refill your own."

"I don't mind if I do," said Chiffin, suiting the action to the word.

"Let's see—what were we talking about?" said Madge, who had likewise brewed a glass for herself. "Oh! I remember—that strange story of the Saxondale family nineteen years ago. Come, I am just in a humour for a good gossip to-night."

"Then it's a very strange humour of yours, Madge," said Chiffin: "for generally speaking you ain't accustomed to talk more than is necessary."

"Oh! but people are not always in the saying humour," said the woman.

"Well, that's true," remarked Chiffin. "I myself don't generally chatter and talk about my exploits, except when I am preciously in the wind—and then I let out everything. Did I ever tell you," asked the ruffian, on whom the frequent potations of brandy-and-water were producing an effect, "how it was I come to be called the Cannibal?"

"Yes—you have told me that story," returned Madge; "and it is precisely because you told it so well, that I want to know about this other business of which you are speaking—I mean the Saxondale affair."

"Well, come, I will tell you all about it," said the Cannibal. "You must know that Ralph Farefield was the old lord's nephew, and was a sad wild fellow, who ran through a lot of money and spoke ill of his uncle. So the old lord was resolved to cut him out, and went and married a young girl all in a great hurry. By her he had three children—two daughters and a son. Now this didn't suit Mr. Ralph's book at all, because the little Edmund would succeed to the peerage and estates. So Ralph determined to have him made away with; and somehow or other he found me out. Well, I wasn't over particular, and Ralph had gold enough to tempt me: besides which I looked to the future, and thought that if through me Ralph got to be Lord Saxondale it would be as good as a pension as long as I lived. So I soon fell into Ralph's plans, and agreed to act. I and some of my pals were to go down into Lincolnshire, carry off the brat, poison it, and then leave the body in some public place where it was sure to be seen: because, don't you understand, Mr. Ralph could scarcely claim to be the heir unless the death of little Edmund was proved? Well, me and the pals went down into Lincolnshire; but for some days we didn't succeed—and as I began to fear that so many suspicious-looking fellows lurking about might cause an alarm and spoil the whole game, I told them to pack off to Gainsborough, which was only a few miles away, and there wait for me."

Here Chiffin paused to imbibe some more alcoholic fluid, which having done, he pursued his narrative in the following manner:—

"The moment I began to act alone, I had good luck: for I succeeded in carrying off the child from its nurse. I had a black mask on my face and frightened the poor girl terribly—so that she fell down in a fit, while I ran away as hard as I could with the baby in my arms. I soon slipped the mask off my face, and made straight for a grove that I saw at a distance. Having reached it, I sat down to rest, and also to do the remainder of my work—which was to kill the child and strip it of its outer clothes so as to give Ralph Farefield a proof that I had fulfilled his mission. But when I felt in my pocket for the little phial of poison, I found it broke; and so I thought to myself there was nothing left to do but to tie a string round the little creature's neck and strangle it. However, I began stripping the clothes off first,—stuffing them into my pockets as I did so; and then I noticed that the child had the mark of a strawberry on its neck. A very singular mark it was—so singular that I couldn't help looking at it, though it was but a tiny

mark, not so big as a sixpence. Well, I had just torn off a string from the child's petticoat and was going to fasten it round his neck—for he was crying a great deal and I wanted to put an end to the business at once—when all of a sudden I heard the voices of several men close by: but I could not immediately see who they were, on account of the thickness of the foliage. Well, thought I to myself, there was a chase after the child, and if I was caught stripping it and with its clothes in my pocket too, I should swing for it! So dropping the brat in a jiffey, I started up and rushed away quite in a different direction from the one where I had heard the voices. Just as I got out of the grove, however, I ran against a great tall hulking gipsy-man with a large stick in his hand. He cried out in a savage manner, asking what the deuce I meant by running against him like that; and then he gave me a good tap with his stick—in return for which I knocked him down with my bludgeon. But the next moment I had our or five other gipsy-men at my heels, who came rushing out of the grove on hearing the disturbance. So, not choosing to stay and fight with such numbers, I cut off as fast as my legs would carry me. They did not pursue me far; and I got clear away. I then sat down and began to reflect what I should do—whether I should go back and endeavour to regain possession of the child or not; for I now felt quite sure that the voices which had alarmed me were those of the gipsy-men and not of any persons in search of the bantling. But then I thought that if I returned into the grove the gipsies would either beat me to death for having knocked down their comrade; or else out of revenge, and perhaps with the hope of reward, go and hand me over to the constables of the nearest town for having stolen and stripped a child. So I was obliged to come to the resolution of leaving things to take their chance, and telling Ralph Farefield the most plausible story I could invent to satisfy him. I accordingly made the best of the way to Gainsborough, and joining my companions at the boozing-ken where they had put up, told them what had happened. We then took separate roads, and hastened back to London. There I told Mr. Farefield that I had killed the child, and left it in a place where it was very likely to be discovered. As a proof of the story I displayed the clothes stripped off the bantling, and which fortunately were marked with the name of the *Hon. Edmund Farefield*. I also told him about the strawberry-mark—and altogether he was satisfied."

Here the Cannibal again paused to refresh himself with more brandy-and-water; and having refilled his glass ready for farther use, he went on thus:—

"A month passed away after the adventure down in Lincolnshire, and as it seemed that nothing was heard about the child, and it did not turn up, I felt pretty sure that either the gipsies had taken it away with them without stopping in the neighbourhood to ascertain whose child was lost, or else that they had left it to its fate in the grove. Or again, it likewise occurred to me that they might not have seen it at all. However, certain sure it was that the child continued missing, as I learnt from Ralph Farefield, who came to question me more particularly about the business. It was a little more than a month after the adventure, when I one day saw in a newspaper that old Lord Saxondale was lying at the point of death down at the castle in Lincolnshire: so I went off to Mr. Farefield's lodgings to let him know: but I found he had gone down into Lincolnshire the day before. Then it struck me that if the old lord should not happen to die of that bout, it might answer Ralph Farefield's purposes if me and my pals were to get into the castle and knock his venerable lordship on the head in the middle of the night. Away we went therefore into Lincolnshire to offer our services to Ralph in that respect: but on arriving in the neighbourhood we heard that the old lord was dead, that Lady Saxondale had recovered her child, and that Ralph Farefield had gone away suddenly in the middle of the very same night of his arrival. Well, I was not over much surprised at hearing that her ladyship had got back the child, knowing what I did about its original loss. I was however terribly put out to think that it was all up with Mr. Ralph: so me and my pals consulted what we should do rather than go back empty-handed to London. In short, we determined upon a crack in the castle, and accordingly broke in at night. An alarm was raised—we found our way to some vaults underneath the chapel—and there what do you think we discovered? You would never guess. The dead body of Ralph Farefield, floating about in the water that had flooded the vaults!"

"Had he been murdered, then?" asked Madge Somers, who listened with a deep interest to the narrative.

"There was no appearance of it," responded Chiffin; "and indeed from what a surgeon afterwards said, there was every reason to believe the contrary—I mean to say, that it was an accident by which he was drowned. But how he came into the vault, heaven only knows! Me and my pals took from about his person all he had in money and jewellery, and left the body lying on the steps leading down into the vault. We then got out of the castle as best we could, and betook ourselves to Gainsborough, where we put up at the boozing-ken that I mentioned just now, and which was kept by a fellow of the right sort. You recollect I told you that when me and my pals were first down in Lincolnshire about Farefield's business, I sent them to Gainsborough while I tried my hand alone at carrying off the child. On that occasion they put up at the boozing-ken I am speaking about; and there they happened to fall in with a resurrectionist chap, whom they had known in London and who had been doing a stroke of business at his trade—body-lifting, I mean—down in Lincolnshire. It was to try and find this fellow again that we betook ourselves to the boozing-ken after our adventure inside Saxondale Castle: because at that time stiff'uns were very scarce in the market and fetched a deuced good price. The laws were very severe then against resurrection-men; and enterprising surgeons who wanted a *subject*, didn't mind giving twenty, thirty, or even forty guineas. Now you begin to understand why me and my pals stopped at Gainsborough to find out Bob Shakerly the body-snatcher. Well, we did succeed in meeting with him, and told him that we knew of where there was a nice stiff'un, pretty fresh, and we thought might be had with a little trouble. So he then told us that there was a young doctor from London stopping in Gainsborough

at the moment—of the name of Ferney, and who had quite a mania for *subjects*. Well, Bob Shakerly went and saw the doctor, and told him what a prize night he had if he chose to give a decent sum for it. This he at once agreed to do; and our arrangements were made accordingly. Me and my pals determined to penetrate once more into the castle and get out the body; for we saw the means of doing it without running any particular risk of discovery. On his side Bob Shakerly agreed to be in the wood close by the castle with a horse and cart in the middle of the night; and things being thus settled, we set to work without delay. You have never been down in that part of Lincolnshire, have you?"

"No—never," answered Madge.

"Well, Saxondale Castle is an immense building, and at least half of it was shut up in those times," continued the Cannibal. "I don't know anything about it now. All we learnt the first time of our breaking in had taught us how to do things better on this second occasion: so we clambered up to one of the windows that overlooked the River Trent, and got into the uninhabited part that way. We went down into the vaults and found the body just where we had left it lying on the steps. One would have thought the rats must have begun to make a meal upon it: but it was quite otherwise — the stiff'un was as fresh and as perfect as when we dragged it out of the water two nights before. Well, we got it up the stone stairs into a sort of vestry-place opening out of the chapel. There we put it into one of those precious big sacks that resurrectionists have for the purpose, and lowered it by ropes out of the window by which we had got in. Our own escape was made without exciting any alarm in the building; and we got the stiff'un safe away into the wood, where Bob Shakerly was waiting with a horse and cart. He then drove off to Gainsborough, while me and my pals followed on foot. Dr. Ferney paid the price agreed upon; and though when it came to be divided amongst us all, our shares wern't very great, yet it was a matter of eight pound apiece — and that was better than nothing. Me and my pals came back to London, and sold Ralph Farefield's jewellery to Solomon Patch. So, all things considering, we did not return quite empty-handed."

"And that is all you have to tell me?" observed Madge Somers, as Chiffin the Cannibal left off speaking.

"Yes—that's all, and enough too I should think," he answered with one of his grim smiles. "Wasn't it a precious string of adventures? But by the by, I may tell you that the Dr. Ferney I have been speaking about, has since become a very celebrated man. Bob Shakerly told me so. Ah! Bob's an old man now, and does nothing in the resurrection line: *subjects* have got so precious cheap since the law was altered, and doctors can get hold of poor people that die in hospitals, and workhouse paupers, and convicts. But Bob is doing pretty well though, in another line: he keeps a knacker's yard down at Cow Cross—Sharp's Alley, I think it is——you must know whereabouts I mean? So having dug up human bodies for the doctors to dissect, he now buys old horses which he dissects himself for cat's-meat and sausages. But it's precious late, Madge, and I think I have had quite enough brandy-and-water: so I will be off. But don't forget to be down at Patch's to-morrow night at nine o'clock—or else you and me are very likely to fall out."

"You know that when I promise I always fulfil my undertaking," replied Madge Somers.

"To be sure: I don't doubt you," said Chiffin. "And now good night."

"Good night," answered the woman: and the Cannibal took his departure.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRESH ADVENTURES ON THE SAME NIGHT.

We left Lord Saxondale at the moment when, having quitted the hut in the precipitate manner already described, he had gained the Seven Sisters Road. It was not in a very lonely part that he now found himself: for *Hornsey Wood Tavern* was within five minutes' walk in one direction, and ten minutes would bring him to the houses in Hornsey Road in another direction. He thought the best thing he could do would be to proceed to the tavern, knock the people up, and procure a bed for the remainder of the night. But while he paused for a few moments in the middle of the road to reflect whether he should adopt this course, or make the best of his way back into London, his ear caught the quick tramplings of a steed approaching from the direction of the metropolis. Almost immediately afterwards the horseman came up to the spot where Saxondale was loitering; and although proceeding at the time at full gallop, he suddenly reined in his steed so that it came to a dead halt.

The reader will remember that it was a clear starlight night; and Saxondale was therefore enabled to perceive that the stranger who had thus stopped so abruptly, had the appearance of a young man very handsomely dressed: but he could see little of his countenance, inasmuch as a great shawl-kerchief, tied round the neck, reached almost up to the nose—while the hat, which had large brims, was drawn low over the forehead. The steed which the traveller bestrode was a magnificent animal; and though evidently docile and obedient to the will of its rider, it nevertheless began pawing the ground with some little degree of impatience at thus being checked in the full career which seemed best suited to its high mettle.

"You are out late to-night, sir," said the horseman, whose voice, though sounding with somewhat muffled accents through the folds of the shawl-neckerchief, was nevertheless mild and agreeable.

"Yes," answered Saxondale, who was just in that frame of mind to be by no means displeased at meeting some one to talk to, after an adventure which had been fraught with so much terror, and the influence of which still lingering upon his mind, made the road seem more lonely and the silence of the night more ominous than under other circumstances they would have appeared. "But I may make the same observation in respect to you. We are both late. It must be considerably past twelve o'clock:" —and pulling out his watch, he examined it by the starlight. "Near one, I declare!"

"Which way lies your road?" inquired the tra-

veller, scrutinizing the young nobleman from beneath the overhanging brim of his hat.

"To tell you the truth," answered Saxondale, with a laugh, "I am benighted, as it were, and was just thinking of going up to the tavern yonder and procuring a bed, when as I was crossing the road you galloped up to the spot."

"It is ten to one that the people will not open their place for you up there at this hour," rejoined the horseman, pointing with his riding-whip towards the tavern upon the neighbouring eminence. "But my house is little more than a mile hence; and if you will condescend to accept such hospitalty as I can afford, a bed is cheerfully at your service. I may observe that I have as pretty a little villa-residence further along the road here, towards Edmonton, as you will see anywhere in this district."

The offer was made with such frank courtesy, and the traveller altogether seemed to be of such genteel and prepossessing appearance, though little of his countenance could be discerned, that Lord Saxondale at once accepted this kind proposal.

"If you like to get up behind me," said the new friend, with still increasing affability of manner, 'a few minutes will bring us to our destination;

and at this hour of the night it is by no means likely we shall encounter any one to notice the singularity of the proceeding. By the bye," he exclaimed, ere pausing for the young nobleman's answer to this last proposition, "I ought perhaps to inform you that I am Captain Chandos, of the British army—unattached at present."

"The circumstances under which we have met, and your kindness, Captain Chandos," returned Edmund, "lead me to express a hope that we shall be better acquainted. I am Lord Saxondale, and shall be most happy to return your civility by receiving you in Park Lane."

"I have heard of your lordship," said the Captain, "as of course everybody has—and am proud at thus enjoying the honour of your company. Now, my lord, catch hold of my arm—I have left the stirrup free for you—and spring up behind me."

This was immediately done; and now behold Lord Saxondale mounted upon this beautiful high-spirited steed, behind its rider, round whose waist he was of course compelled to throw his arm in order to sustain his balance. Captain Chandos just touched the flanks of the horse with his spurs; and the animal started off at a easy gallop. A little further on the steed suddenly shied somewhat at a mile-stone which stood out in white and ghastly contrast against the dark hedge: and this little incident, by disturbing Lord Saxondale's equilibrium for a moment, led him to cling all the more tightly to the Captain. But he was suddenly seized with a strange feeling of astonishment when his hand encountered a remarkable fullness about the breast of the Captain's surtout-coat—so that the impression naturally made all in a moment upon Edmund's mind, was that his companion must be a woman in disguise. So bewildered was he by this discovery that he knew not what to say or do; and as the steed was galloping along the road towards Edmonton, the young nobleman rapidly experienced the most unpleasant doubts and misgivings springing up within him. At length, when he had made up his mind to turn the matter off in a laugh and inquire "who the fair unknown was that thus in male apparel played the part of Captain Chandos in her Majesty's service," the gallant officer himself—for we had better continue to speak of the rider in the masculine gender—suddenly reined in his steed in the most lonely part of the road; and clutching Lord Saxondale by the arm which encircled the slender waist and had been pressing against the tell-tale bosom, he gave him such a sudden whirl and jerk that the astounded Edmund was swept clean off the horse and landed upon his feet in the middle of the road.

"Now, my lord," said the audacious Captain, suddenly producing a pistol from the holster of his saddle, "your purse—your watch—and those rings from your fingers!"

Lord Saxondale was very far from being the most valorous young man in existence; and the sight of the pistol gleaming in the argentine splendour which poured down from the heavens, at once filled him with dismay. He cast an anxious look rapidly up and down the road—but no succour was nigh, nor did a sound of approaching horse or vehicle meet his ears.

"Come—quick, quick!" exclaimed Captain Chandos, the accents of whose voice, though still somewhat muffled by the thick shawl-kerchief, nevertheless sounded peremptory enough. "Keep me not waiting as you value your life!"

"But—but—you are joking, Captain—I mean fair unknown—whoever you are," stammered Saxondale, still with a faint hope that it might prove a frolicsome jest after all.

"If you keep me talking here another minute, you will find it to be no joke, I can assure you," at once rejoined the bold amazon. "Now then, my lord, quick!—your purse, and so forth!"

The wretched Saxondale, perceiving that the fair unknown was indeed terribly in earnest, drew forth his purse with trembling hands and craven demeanour: then he surrendered up his watch, with the gold chain—and lastly he took the rings from his fingers.

"You have handsome diamond studs in your shirt," said the amazon, "but I will leave you them. I do not wish to strip you altogether:"—and a merry kind of laugh sounded from behind the muffling shawl-kerchief. "Now, my lord," added the false Captain, "I need scarcely enjoin you to hold your tongue relative to the adventure you have just experienced: for your pride will prevent you from proclaiming to the whole world that you have been robbed by a woman."

With these words, the female highwayman put spurs to her steed, which started away at full gallop; and in a few moments the amazonian desperado disappeared in the distance.

Discomfited, abashed, and devoured with shame, young Lord Saxondale stood transfixed to the spot in most wretched bewilderment. The spiteful elements of his character being aroused, he gnashed his teeth with impotent rage—and then he actually shed tears of vexation and annoyance. There he was, at a considerable distance from London—penniless—at an advanced hour of the night, or rather an early one of the morning—and so exhausted with fatigue that he trembled at the idea of the long walk which seemed before him. The whole night's adventures had been but too well calculated to terrify, harass, weary, and humiliate him. First startled up from a very short sleep—compelled to dress in haste and go forth to look for a bed elsewhere—then taken at least another mile farther out of his way, to be plundered and put to shame by a female in masculine attire—and now left to manage as best he could for the remainder of the night—these were the unpleasant topics of Lord Saxondale's reflections!

However, he must not only put the best face on the matter, but also the best foot foremost. Full truly indeed had the female highwayman observed, with a mocking laugh, that he would only be too anxious to keep the adventure as close as possible within his own breast: for were it to transpire that he had suffered himself to be thus despoiled of his purse, his watch, and his rings, by a woman, he would be so unmercifully laughed at as to be ashamed ever to show his face in society again. Therefore, as to keeping his own counsel relative to the robbery, his mind was made up in a moment; and with regard to his present predicament, the only alternative was to get back into London as best he could. So he walked on towards the Seven Sisters Road again, and which he soon reached. In a little while he paused at the corner of the narrow lane leading

up to *Hornsey Wood Tavern*; but recollecting that he had not a farthing in his pocket, he dared not bend his steps thither to knock the people up. He accordingly walked on, and in another quarter of an hour arrived opposite Evergreen Villa, which he could not help regarding as the origin, so to speak, of all his manifold adventures and misfortunes of this night. Indeed, so thoroughly sickened, dispirited, depressed, and humiliated did he feel—so thoroughly wretched too in every sense of the word—that as he stood gazing upon Evergreen Villa for a few moments, he was almost inclined to make a vow that he would abandon his previously enthusiastic designs in that quarter.

But while he thus paused opposite Evergreen Villa, he suddenly observed through the somewhat thick screen of trees in the front garden, a light glimmering from one of the windows on the ground-floor. To the best of his calculations (for he had no watch to refer to) it was now nearly two o'clock in the morning.

"Monday night," he said to himself, thus musingly refreshing his memory; "and Angela Vivaldi was not advertised to dance: so they cannot be sitting up for her to return from the Opera. Besides, she would be home before this. And yet why should she not have been out at some party?"—and as these reflections swept through his brain, he suddenly experienced some little revival of his passion for the fair *danseuse*.

As he still lingered hesitatingly in front of the villa, he heard a door open: and then a much stronger light suddenly shone from behind the screen of trees. He advanced up to the gate opening from the footpath, and perceived a female descending the steps of the front-door, which stood wide open and whence the light of the hall-lamp was streaming forth. The female had the appearance of being a lady's-maid, or domestic of a similarly superior grade; and as she came slowly along the gravel-walk leading towards the gate, Saxondale had an opportunity of observing that she was young, rather good-looking, dressed with a coquettish gaiety, and having the arch mischievious look of a confidential *soubrette*.

Here suddenly seemed to be an opportunity of doing for himself all that the old woman had undertaken to perform, but in which she had so grossly and unaccountably deceived him; and feeling his spirits somewhat revive by the hopefulness of the occurrence which was thus transpiring, he waited in the shade of the trees near the gate until the lady's-maid, as he presumed her to be, came near enough for him to address her. Then she stopped, and seemed to listen as if in expectation of some one's approach.

"Well, my pretty maid," said Lord Saxondale, suddenly showing himself, "you are taking a late walk in the garden here."

"Oh, dear! how you have startled me," exclaimed the abigail, with a half-suppressed shriek: but as she immediately perceived that the cause of her more than half-affected alarm was evidently a gentleman by his dress, the self-sufficiency of his speech, and the diamond studs which gleamed in the starlight, she did not see any necessity for hurrying away from the spot; on the contrary, advancing close up to the gate, she rather appeared to court the little chat which accident thus threw in her way.

"What are you doing out here so late?" asked Lord Saxondale.

"Well, it's like your impudence to question me in this manner!" said the young woman with an arch toss of her head, though evidently being very far from offended. "And suppose I was to ask how it is *you* are out so late?"

"Well, then, I should at once tell you," returned Saxondale. "I have been dining up at the tavern yonder, with a parcel of friends of mine; and we have swallowed no small quantity of wine. Then we had cards and dice; and if I had not lost a matter of three or four hundred guineas, I should at once slip a ten-pound note into your hand as an earnest of future rewards if you lend me your aid in a certain enterprise I have in view."

"Oh! I am sure you must indeed have been drinking a great deal of wine to talk to me in this way," said the lady's-maid, with an affected giggle, which showed that if Lord Saxondale were really earnest in what he said he was at perfect liberty to go on and explain himself without the fear of giving offence.

"I can assure you that I speak the truth," he immediately rejoined. "But though I have lost all my money at cards, as I tell you, there is nothing to prevent me from coming up to this neighbourhood to-morrow and making it twenty guineas instead of ten, that I design as a little present for your acceptance."

"Oh, yes—I dare say! It is all very pretty to talk in this manner," cried the maid, with another laugh, as if she pretended to regard his behaviour only as a mere pleasantry. "But I should like to know in the first place who you are, that you speak so fine and make such magnificent promises?"

The young nobleman had not been despoffed of his card-case by the female highwayman: he accordingly took it forth from his pocket, and producing one of its pasteboard contents, handed the same to the lady's-maid, who was enabled by the clearness of the night to read the name upon it.

"Well, my lord," she said, with a somewhat more respectful tone—though all along her manner had been affably familiar and flippantly gracious enough—"I of course begin to believe that you are serious in what you have said; for of course a gentleman never breaks a promise—and a lord is more than a gentleman."

"Now tell me who you are waiting for?" said the young nobleman.

"For my mistress, whom I expect home every minute," was the reply. "I got so tired of waiting that I came out hoping to hear the sounds of the carriage-wheels. And, by the bye, the moment we do catch them, your lordship must hasten away."

"Would your mistress chide you for speaking to me?" asked Saxondale.

"I don't exactly know that she would—for she is indulgent enough," was the response: "but at the same time if any one came home with her, it would look so odd for me to be seen talking to a gentleman at the gate. Besides——"

"Besides, what?" inquired Saxondale, as the *soubrette* suddenly stopped short. "Tell me, what were you about to say?"

"Oh, nothing!" rejoined the young woman, with an arch smile through the bars of the gate. "Only——"

"Only what? You have got something at the very tip of your tongue and do not like to say it."

"Well, my lord, I am speaking to a stranger," returned the young woman, somewhat more seriously than before: "and of course I do not like to gossip about my mistress's affairs to everybody."

"Your mistress belongs to the Opera?" observed Saxondale.

"Ah! then you know something about her?" at once exclaimed the *soubrette*. "And now I remember your lordship did say something about entertaining certain views and requiring my assistance. Was that said for fun or in earnest?"

"Quite in earnest," answered Saxondale; "and it was for that purpose I promised you a reward. Indeed, if I had not been robbed——"

"Robbed! I thought you had lost your money at cards?"

"To be sure! I said so. But cannot a person be robbed at cards as well as on the highway?"

"Certainly. However, I have your lordship's promise for a proof of your kindness; and as I consider your word to be your bond, I am just as ready to listen to what your lordship has to say as if I had the gift in my pocket."

"From something that has escaped my lips," resumed Edmund, "you have seen that I know a little about your mistress. I have seen her at the Opera – and to see is to admire. But there is still another step which is to be explained by stating that to admire is to burn to possess. Now, in plain terms, is there anything to hope?"

"It all depends, my lord," replied the *soubrette*.

"Depends upon what?" inquired Saxondale.

"Terms—offers—settlements—and so forth," was the answer.

"Then, is your mistress mercenary?"

"Not exactly mercenary—but she loves money, just as a great many other ladies do, as a means of procuring pleasure, to live in good style, keep her carriage and servants, and so forth—all of which she could not do with her salary at the Opera."

"And yet she is handsomely paid, according to report," remarked Edmund.

"Not so well as people think, perhaps," rejoined the *soubrette*. "But you asked me if there were any hope? It is for you to get acquainted with my mistress, and see what she says. You do not seem too bashful, my lord, in making known your wishes; and certainly she will not be too bashful in giving you an answer. Of course I shall say everything I can in your favour; and you know that a lady's-maid in these cases possesses great influence with her mistress."

"Undoubtedly. You *are* her lady's-maid, then? I thought so the very first moment I saw you. One can always tell a lady's-maid——"

"Yes—we have a certain air," remarked the young woman, tossing her head conceitedly. "But why, my lord, do you not come and call tomorrow? or else write a very tender and affectionate billet?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Saxondale; "is it possible that your mistress would either receive me as a visitor without any introduction, or take notice of any letter I might send her?"

"Well, considering that you are a lord," responded the *soubrette* slyly, and with a sort of mysterious confidence, "I think it very probable my mistress might dispense with the usual formalities. Indeed, if she were to come home alone presently, I am not quite sure but that you might be pardoned for your boldness in introducing yourself to her at once."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, now so elated that he forgot all the previous misadventures of the night.

"It is so possible," was the response, "that I should advise you to make the attempt. Or if you are too bashful, you can just walk a little way up the road and leave me to say a few words to my mistress. Then, if I were to come down to the gate and ask you to walk in and take supper with her—for she always has supper when she comes home, and it is now ready served in the drawing-room——"

"If you are not trifling with me," exclaimed Edmund, "and if you could really manage what you have just proposed, it should not be merely twenty guineas that I would put into your hand to-morrow, but fifty."

"Well, my lord," answered the *soubrette*, "it all depends upon whether a certain person comes home presently with my mistress. And that, to tell you the truth, was what I alluded to just now when you told me I had something at the tip of my tongue that I did not like to speak out."

"But who is this certain person?" inquired Saxondale.

"Mr. Walter, at the Opera."

"What, one of the great authorities of the establishment?" ejaculated Saxondale. "Oh! I know him tolerably well. I have frequently spoken to him behind the scenes—a stout, elderly gentleman——"

"The same," responded the *soubrette*. "He's a nice enough man in his way, but very particular indeed; and that was why I was fearful that if he did come home presently with my mistress, he would be angry on finding me talking to any one at the gate. Oh! he is so particular," repeated the abigail, "and treats my mistress just as if she were his wife—hands her in and out of her carriage with the greatest respect——"

"But what, then, has he to do with your mistress?" demanded Saxondale. "Is he related to her?"

"Oh! my lord, how stupid you are! Can't you guess?"—then with another slylook, and once more in a mysterious tone of confidence, the *soubrette* added, "He is just as much related to her as your lordship wishes to be."

"Do you mean to tell me she is living under his protection?" demanded Edmund in astonishment.

The *soubrette* nodded her head affirmatively.

"Oh, the sly puss!" ejaculated Saxondale: "and rumour speaks so highly of her virtue! Well, after all, I was right," he observed, musing audibly, "in what I said to my friend Staunton, when I declared that I had no great opinion of the virtue of any female upon the stage. But still I did think that *she* was virtuous as yet—although I fancied that her virtue was not an impregnable citadel. And you tell me," he continued, again addressing himself to the *soubrette*, "that your mistress is living under the protection of this Mr. Walter?"

"Yes. Is there anything astonishing in it?"

"Oh, nothing at all! But is she much attached to him?"

"No—far from it: and between you and me, my lord, the conquest will not prove altogether so difficult as you may fancy. But here she comes! Hasten away for a few minutes!"

Lord Saxondale, whose ear had suddenly caught the sounds of an approaching vehicle at the same time as the lady's-maid's, at once acted in obedience to her suggestion, and hurried higher up the road. Then stopping and looking back, he perceived a brougham drive up to the gate of the villa-garden. The lady's-maid immediately issued forth—the coachman leapt down—and one person only emerged from the carriage. That person was a female—and she at once entered the precincts of Evergreen Villa.

"Now then," thought Saxondale to himself, as he experienced a thrilling exultation of the heart, "it is about ten to one that within a very few minutes I shall have the happiness of being in the presence of Signora Vivaldi. That *soubrette* of her's is an artful hussey, and is pretty sure to manage the business cleverly. Ah! now the coachman takes the vehicle round to the stables. I wonder how long I shall have to wait here? Perhaps the maid is already opening the matter to her mistress. But if the world only knew what I have discovered to-night—that the beautiful Angela Vivaldi, whose virtue has been paraded off as immaculate as her loveliness is transcending, is nothing more nor less than the kept mistress of one of the great Dons of the Opera, what casting up of eyes, and holding up of hands, and lifting up of voices there would be! Well, after all, it will be a conquest of its kind—because I know she has refused so many offers and has treated so many letters with contemptuous silence. And yet, if she should all of a sudden receive me into favour it will be rather astonishing. But the *soubrette* spoke confidently enough! Ah! I know what it must be! This Signora has her pride and has refused two or three Marquises, four or five Earls, and a whole score of Barons, just because they were not of ancient family; and I presume that cunning *soubrette*, knowing that I am descended from ancestors who lived in the time of the Tudors, is very well aware beforehand that her mistress will not say nay to *me*."

In these and similar musings did half-an-hour pass, while the conceited young nobleman was kicking his heels to and fro in the road. At length he became uneasy. Was it possible that the lady's-maid had been laughing in her sleeve at him the whole time? He began to fear so. But if it were the case, would it not add the crowning ignominy to all the previous humiliations of this memorable night? Saxondale was rapidly falling into despondency. But ah! the front door of the villa opens—a female form trips forth and speeds down to the gate! With hope suddenly reviving—not merely reviving, but soaring up into exultation—Lord Saxondale hurries thither; and the first glance he obtains of the lady's-maid's countenance, is the harbinger of happiness.

"Well, what news have you for me?" he impatiently asked.

"Let this be the reply," responded the *soubrette:* and she opened the gate.

Edmund hastened in: the young woman shut the gate—and hurriedly conducted him into the hall. There, as she closed the front door, she threw upon him a look full of arch meaning, and whispered "Did I not tell you that I should succeed? did I not promise a triumph?"

Lord Saxondale could scarcely retain his joy as he breathed the most liberal promises in the ears of the young woman.

"Walk in, my lord," she said throwing open a door leading out of the hall. "My mistress will be with you immediately. She is merely making some change in her toilet."

Saxondale entered an apartmtment that was not merely elegantly, but even luxuriously furnished. A table in the centre was spread with a supper consisting of several cold dainties and choice wines. The curtains had been drawn closely over the windows; and the room was lighted by a lustre suspended from the ceiling.

"Now," thought Lord Saxondale to himself, "in a few minutes—perhaps in a few seconds—I shall have an opportunity of gazing close upon those charms which I have already devoured from a distance. But hers is a loveliness which cannot diminish by a near view. Ah! what happiness!"—and he literally rubbed his hands with delight.

At this moment he heard female voices whispering in the hall: then the door opened—and then a lady of tall stature, great beauty, and elastic walk, entered the room. She was clad in an elegant wrapper thrown loosely around her; and in her appearance there was not merely that negligent abandonment of one who has just put on a deshabillée, but also a meretricious exposure of her charms.

She was *not* the Signora Vivaldi—and therefore Lord Saxondale at once took her to be either a guest or a relation of a fair *danseuse*. He accordingly bowed with the politest courtesy, but volunteered no explanation of his object in obtaining this interview.

"Your lordship will doubtless think me very indiscreet and very imprudent," said the lady, motioning him to be seated, as she threw herself listlessly upon a sofa placed near the supper-table, "in receiving you at this time of night—or rather, I should say, at so early an hour in the morning: but from all that my maid told me of your lordship's anxiety to form my acquaintance, I was vain enough to suppose——"

"Your maid?" echoed Lord Saxondale, with unfeigned astonishment. "Surely there must be some mistake? It was the fair mistress of the villa to whom I was desirous of paying my respects."

"And I, my lord," answered the lady, reddening with mingled indignation and wounded pride, "am the mistress of the villa! If your lordship is disappointed, and expected to meet some other person, your lordship can retire. It was not I who sought this interview: and therefore the humiliation of the mistake will not rest with me."

"Do not be angry, I beseech you!" cried Saxondale, scarcely recovering from his bewilderment. "It is true that I had been led to imagine another lady lived here: but the one in whose presence I have the honour to find myself, is so charming a substitute that it is as it were only finding myself in one part of Paradise when I had fancied that I was being led to another."

"Your lordship at all events has the art of turning a compliment most prettily," said the young lady, smiling so as to reveal a set of very beautiful

teeth. "But pray whom did you expect to meet here on the present occasion?"

"To tell you the truth, it was the Signora Vivaldi," answered Saxondale.

"Oh, the prude!" instantaneously cried the fair one, with an indignant toss of the head. "But I begin to understand how this mistake originated. It is doubtless because I also belonging to the Opera——"

"Just so!" exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "And now tell me at whose feet I have the honour of kneeling?" he added, suiting the action to the word, and dropping down upon his knees before the lady whose hand he took and pressed to his lips.

"You may know me as Emily Archer, if you like," was the response, accompanied by a sweet seductive smile: "but at the Opera and to the world I am known as Mademoiselle D'Alembert."

"Oh! then, if I have lost one beautiful *danseuse*, I have obtained another!" exclaimed Edmund, as he again pressed her hand to his lips: then rising from his knees and seating himself by her side, he said, "How foolish in me not to have recognized you at once! I have often admired you—and between ourselves considered you a much finer *artiste* than the Signora Vivaldi——"

"Ah! my dear Lord Saxondale," exclaimed Miss Archer, "it is only jealousy, and bad taste, and envy, and want of discernment, and all kinds of nasty feelings, that have put me second instead of first. But come, let us take some supper—and a glass of champagne will enliven our discourse."

Lord Saxondale and the meretricious beauty of the Opera-ballet accordingly placed themselves at table; and by the time the young nobleman had imbibed his third glass of champagne he had not merely forgotten the beautiful Angela altogether, but found himself breathing the most extravagant proposals in the ears of the seductive Emily Archer.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT.

TURN we now to the residence of Lady Macdonald in Cavendish Square.

It was six o'clock in the evening of the day that followed the night of Lord Saxondale's many adventures; and Lady Florina Staunton was seated in her own private apartment adjoining her bedchamber. The room was splendidly furnished; and the ornaments were of a character which displayed the refined taste of its presiding divinity. Several exquisite alabaster statues were dispersed about—there were vases filled with flowers which exhaled a delicious perfume—and on a side table were scattered drawing-materials, with a few exquisite specimens of the art in water-colour.

Florina was dressed for a party. Her beautiful hair was arranged in ringlets, and ornamented with pearls and a single camelia that seemed typical of her own virgin purity. She was seated at a table, whereon lay a book and a letter, both of which she had been reading. The former was a volume of Scott's Poems, of which she was a great admirer: the letter was one that had been received by her aunt that same afternoon from Mr. Gunthorpe, and which had been given to our fair heroine to read.

But at the moment when we thus afford the reader a glimpse into that splendidly furnished apartment, Lady Florina was neither reading book nor letter, but was plunged into a deep reverie. Exquisitely beautiful did she seem as she sat, statue-like, in her rich dress and with her looks bent pensively downwards,—so exquisitely beautiful indeed, that it appeared a sin to allow the heart of so fair a creature to experience the slightest source of vexation or sorrow! And yet sorrow did lurk in that gentle bosom of hers: for the young lady could not blind herself to the circumstance that in being regarded as the future wife of Lord Saxondale, she was to be sacrificed to the wretched conventionalisms of high life, and that her hand was to be bestowed upon one whom she could not possibly love and who even inspired her with aversion and disgust. But there was another circumstance to which Florina could not close her convictions: and this was, that if she did not love Lord Saxondale she nevertheless loved another!

"Yes," she thought to herself in the depth of that reverie in which we find her plunged, "*he* is one of nature's true aristocracy and needs no factitious ornament of rank nor accidental advantage of fortune to render him truly estimable. I feel that I love him! I can no longer shut out this truth from my mind. But in thus admitting it unto myself, is it not the same as acknowledging my own unhappiness? Alas, yes! for it is in vain that I love him——I never can be his. Oh! that he loves me in return, I know—I am convinced! Yes, William Deveril loves me!"—and as she thus spoke his name even to herself, she suddenly started as if with the consciousness of some guilty thought or deed. "And now," she continued, in her silent reverie, "I am decked to go forth into the brilliant saloons of fashion—to smile with my lips while my heart is weeping—to look happy in my face while my my soul is dark with sorrow!"

At this moment a door opened at the extremity of Lady Florina's apartment; and galvanized as it were from her deep absorbing reverie, she started and looked round, as if fearful lest the person now entering, whoever it were, might read in her features the thoughts that had been agitating in her mind.

"Ah, my dear aunt!" she exclaimed, rising from her chair: "is the carriage at the door?"

"Yes, Flo dear," responded Lady Macdonald—an elderly woman, superbly dressed, but the artifices of whose toilet could not conceal and scarcely even mitigate the ravages of time upon a beauty that in her younger days had been of no common order. "It is half-past six—Lady Saxondale dines at seven—and you know that she is so particular, she is always punctual."

"I am ready, aunt," replied Florina. "But surely it will not take half-an-hour," she added, smiling. "to reach Park Lane?—and I know that you do not like to be there much before the time."

"True," observed Lady Macdonald: "we will wait five minutes. Have you read Mr. Gunthorpe's letter which I sent into you just now?"

"I have read it with some degree of astonishment," answered Florina. "The other night, when he first introduced himself to me and Harold at the Opera, he said that he should be delighted to pay you a visit; and I assured him that you would be well pleased to show him every attention. And

now," added Florina, taking up the letter from the table and glancing her eyes over it, "he says that his numerous occupations in the City and the attention which he has to devote to certain business-matters, have compelled him to decide upon resigning for the present the advantages he would otherwise have been delighted to reap from Uncle Eagleden's letters of introduction. He dined with Harold the other day," added Florina, speaking hesitatingiy; "and I do hope that my brother treated him with civility."

"Mr. Gunthorpe appears to be a singular kind of person," remarked Lady Macdonald. "However, he can act as he pleases. By the bye, talking of Harold—is he to be at Saxondale House this evening?"

"I believe so," responded Florina: "but I have not seen him to-day."

"And Edmund—has he called?" asked Lady Macdonald.

"He has not been here since Saturday, when he came with Harold to take me to the Opera."

"What! and this is Tuesday evening?" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of vexation. "Three whole days without coming to pay his respects to you!—that is rather too bad——And yet," she immediately added, "it is nothing in high life. The sphere in which we move is in many respects different from the other grades of society in its usages and customs."

"Then I wish that I had been born in another sphere," observed Florina, in the lowest and most melting accents of her fluid voice.

"Nicce, I do not like remarks of this kind," exclaimed Lady Macdonald, in a tone of remonstrance.

"But my dear aunt," replied the gentle girl, "surely the satisfaction of expressing my fanciful wishes is left to me, even though all other power of free-will be denied."

"What means this language, niece?" demanded Lady Macdonald. "Ah, I understand! It is one of those covert reproaches which you sometimes throw out against me, for having studied your best possible interests by arranging with Lady Saxondale that her son was to become your accepted suitor. I hope that you will not prove ungrateful——"

"Ungrateful!—no, not to you, my dear aunt!" cried the young lady, approaching her elderly relative and looking affectionately up into her countenance. "To me you have supplied the place of a lost mother; and I know that all you do is done for the best. Still——"

"Hush, my dear child!" exclaimed Lady Macdonald, who really loved her niece: "I know what you would say. You would tell me the old story—that you cannot love Edmund: but in the sphere in which we move," continued her ladyship, making use of a phrase which was a great favourite with her, "love has very little to do with marriages. If I had a fortune to leave you, my dear girl, it would be different: but as all I possess dies with me, it was absolutely necessary for me to think of settling you well in life—and with all his faults, Lord Saxondale is a very eligible match. Besides, these faults of his are only the invariable frolics of youth; and it is better that he should sow his wild oats when young, before he marries, so that after he does marry he may settle down into a steady and quiet husband. But while we are talking here the time is slipping away, and we must be off."

Lady Macdonald and her niece thereupon descended to the carriage that was waiting, and in which they were borne to Park Lane. On arriving at Saxondale House, they were conducted up-stairs to the magnificent drawing-room, where Lady Saxondale, with her two daughters, was waiting to receive her guests. Her ladyship was sumptuously apparelled, and looked as if invested with a perfectly imperial dignity. Juliana, the elder daughter, likewise shone in the glory of that proud and haughty beauty which she inherited from her mother: while the delicate and interesting loveliness of Constance appeared to greater advantage by the contrast.

"Where is Edmund?" asked Lady Macdonald, when the usual greetings had been exchanged on all sides.

"I expect him every moment: I should hope that he will not fail to make his appearance," responded Lady Saxondale, a cloud lowering upon her grandly handsome countenance, as if she felt that it was too bad for her son not to be there already. "He knows that there is a dinner-party this evening——"

Her ladyship's sentence was interrupted by the opening of the door; and Lord Petersfield was announced. This was one of Edmund's guardians, and was therefore received with very great attention and extreme politeness by Lady Saxondale. He was an old man—stout, but not exactly corpulent—tall and stately—and dignified even to solemn pomposity both in his manner and speech. He was a diplomatist, and had been ambassador to several of the principal European Courts; but for certain political reasons which it is not worth while to enter into here, heat present held no office although the party to which he belonged was at the time in power. The most common observer could not be five minutes in his company without discovering him to be a diplomatist, though previously uniuformed of the fact: for Lord Petersfield never spoke a word that was not duly measured, and scarcely ventured to perform the most trivial action without appearing to reflect whether it were a wise one or not. Ever invested with that solemn and indeed awful air of gravity which he had contracted during a long career in diplomacy, Lord Petersfield constantly looked as if the weight of the whole world's affairs were upon his shoulders, and that the slightest unguarded word would plunge them into ruin. Sometimes, if he could not make up his mind what answer to give to even the most trivial question put to him, he would remain scrupulously silent. Thus, if anybody observed that "the weather was very fine," and Lord Petersfield on casting his eyes upwards beheld the least cloud upon the heavens, he would prudently shut himself up in a solemn silence rather than stand the chance of compromising his judgment by admitting that it was fine when it was just possible to rain. If his opinion were asked upon any passing event or current topic, he was very seldom able to bring his mind to give an immediate response: he was not aware—he had not thought upon it—or it was a subject that required the deepest consideration. If he were met in the street proceeding to his Club or to the House

of Lords, and being asked whither he was going, he would not immediately reply—it was possible he might be on his way to the one place or the other—but he would not pledge himself to the fact he would rather not compromise himself by the assurance that it was so—many things might happen in the interval. Indeed, Lord Petersfield had a holy abhorrence of all downright questions, and never could give a prompt or straightforward answer. He even once, when accosted at a party and asked if he were not Lord Petersfield, looked positively dismayed at such a pointed question, replying that he did not exactly know—he had not considered upon it—he would rather not compromise himself—he might be Lord Petersfield—it was possible—but still no man ought to be called upon to answer in a hurry a query of such grave personal importance. Nay, it was even whispered that when his lordship (who married late in life, conducted his intended to the altar, and was asked "whether he would take that woman to be his wife," his countenance grew awfully grave and his looks profoundly solemn, while he assured the clergyman that he was not prepared to speak decidedly upon the point—he did not like to compromise himself—and had a very particular aversion to such pointed queries.

Such was Lord Petersfield, one of Lady Saxondale's guests on the occasion of which we are writing. Mr. Marlow, Edmund's other guardian (of the firm of Marlow and Malton), was also invited; and a very different person he was from his colleague in the trusteeship. For precisely as Lord Petersfield was slow, pompous, and heavy, was the solicitor quick in action, glib in speech, and volatile in motion. When the door was thrown open and his name was announced, he rushed in all in a flurry, just as if he were late for an important case coming on before the Judges at Westminster; and in the space of three minutes he would talk more than Lord Petersfield ever spoke in three years.

A quick succession of guests soon followed the arrival of Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow,——Lords and Ladies, Right Honourables and Honourables—in short, a brilliant company to the number of fifty: for this was a very grand dinner-party that Lady Saxondale was giving on the present occasion. Lord Harold was amongst the guests: but it was not till the very last minute, and just as Lady Saxondale was beginning to despair, that Edmund made his appearance.

It was now just five minutes past seven o'clock, and Lady Saxondale, who liked to be very punctual, felt happy as she glanced around, and rapidly counted to herself all the guests who were present, saw that their number was complete. That elegant-looking page whom we have especially noticed in a preceding chapter, now entered the room, and gliding noiselessly over the thick carpet, approached his noble mistress, who, fancying that he came merely to receive the usual order to serve dinner up at once, nodded in a significant manner to that effect. But it appeared that the page's object in accosting Lady Saxondale at the moment was of another kind: for he bent down and whispered, "Please, my lady, a woman is waiting in the hall to speak to your ladyship upon very important business."

"Did you not give her a proper answer?" asked Lady Saxondale, in a low tone, but with an angry look, as if she thought the page had not done his duty.

"I assured the woman," was the whispered response, "that your ladyship would see no one now; but she desired me to say that she must have an interview if only for a minute, without delay too, for she has got to be quite at the other end of London by nine o'clock. Please, my lady, those are the woman's own words."

Lady Saxondale seemed struck by an astonishment not unmingled with dismay at this intelligence, and for a moment she hesitated how to act—murmuring to herself, "Who can it possibly be?" Then suddenly making up her mind, she said, "Go and show the woman into the parlour down stairs, and I will come to her in a moment."

None of the guests overheard this rapid and brief colloquy between her ladyship and the page: nor was the emotion of the former, on receiving so insolent a message, observed by any one present in the drawing-room, save her elder daughter Juliana—and this young lady's attention was only drawn to the incident by the circumstance that from under her long eye-lashes she was bending stealthy and sidelong glances towards the beautiful page the whole time that he was in the room. Thus was it that Juliana was led to observe that something had transpired to vex and alarm her mother: but though suddenly animated with a deep curiosity to learn what it was, she did not dare follow her parent from the room for the purpose.

Lady Saxondale, with a gracious apology to those guests who were seated near her for her being compelled to leave them for an instant, quitted the apartment, and proceeded down stairs to the room where the obtrusive visitress was waiting to see her. Her ladyship remained absent for about a quarter of an hour, during which interval Juliana was puzzling herself to conjecture what on earth it could be that had thus evidently troubled her mother. At the expiration of that time Lady Saxondale returned to the drawing-room: and still from beneath her long dark lashes did Juliana intently watch her mother's countenance She at once saw that it was pale, and bore the traces of very recent agitation—an agitation, too, which was evidently still heaving within her ladyship's bosom, but all outward appearance of which she was endeavouring with a mighty effort to conceal. Returning to her seat, she at once entered with high-bred ease and graceful courtesy into the topic of the conversation that was going on around her; but in the tones of her mother's voice the keen and cunning Juliana perceived the evidences of that inward trouble which she had already observed reflected in her looks.

Dinner was announced; and the aristocratic throng proceeded to the banquetting-room, which presented a magnificent appearance to the eye. It was completely flooded with the dazzling light shed from two lustres each containing at least forty wax-candles; the table literally groaned beneath the massive services of plate; and twenty domestics in gorgeous liveries were in attendance. The dinner passed off as all such banquets in high life usually do—that is to say, heavily,—all real enthusiasm of feeling and true sense of enjoyment being weighed down and chilled by the petrifying influence of formality. Lord Petersfield was, if possible, more reserved, guarded, and cautious in all he said and

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did than ever; and his air of diplomacy hung about him with a truly awful effect. When asked which soup he would prefer, he gave the domestic such an overwhelming gaze that the unfortunate footman wished the floor would open and swallow him up: but when pointedly asked by Lady Saxondale which part of the turbot he preferred, he looked as if he thought there was a design to entrap him into some snare or take an advantage of him. In this way his lordship helped to render the ceremonials of the dinner-table more coldly ceremonious still, and the formalities more icily formal. As for Lady Saxondale, she did the honours of the table with the dignified grace and well-bred courtesy becoming her rank, and also her position as mistress of the house: but despite all her efforts to throw a veil over the thoughts that were agitating within her brain, there were nevertheless moments when the keen eye of Juliana could detect a sudden expression of anguish flitting over her mother's proud countenance; and she likewise noticed the almost preterhuman effort which on those occasions her ladyship exerted to rise dominant as it were above the internal agony that was tortaring her. More than ever, therefore, was Juliana's curiosity excited; and in the secret depths of her own mind did she resolve by some means or another to penetrate the mystery.

It was not till past nine o'clock that the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, and the gentlemen were left at table to drink a few more glasses of wine ere summoned to partake of coffee. Thank heaven! the disgusting and bestial system of sitting for hours over the wine after the ladies have retired, has of late years been rapidly falling into desuetude, English habits in this respect yielding to the civilizing influences of French examples. But still, at dinner-parties, the gentlemen persist in remaining a little while to enjoy a jovial glass until coffee be served up in the drawing-room; and so it was upon the present occasion. Mr. Marlow, glad to be relieved from the shackles of those formalities which had hitherto prevailed, began to rattle away with his wonted volubility, and quite alarmed Lord Petersfield by suddenly asking that nobleman which his lordship preferred, generally speaking, the French or Rhenish wines? The cautious diplomatist gave Mr. Marlow an awful look, as if he shrewdly suspected the cunning lawyer meant to take some advantage of him by so pointed a question: then in grave and solemn tones, he announced that it was a subject which, considering the rival interests that existed in respect to wines between France and Germany, he could not possibly be expected to give an opinion upon, until he had examined all the most recent parliamentary documents bearing on the point. Indeed, his lordship more than hinted that the very stability of existing treaties might be jeopardized by hazarding too rash an opinion on such a grave and important subject.

Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, who had hitherto been separated during the dinner, now took advantage of the comparative freedom which the withdrawal of the ladies permitted; and getting together they began to chat in a low tone upon affairs interesting only to themselves.

"Well, how have you got on with the beauteous Angela?" asked Lord Harold.

"Not at all," was the response. "But such an adventure! I cannot tell it you all now. Your valet Alfred, despite his cleverness, was quite wrong——"

"What do you mean? Did he not put you on the true scent?"

"At this very moment," returned Saxondale, "I am as ignorant as ever I was of the abode of Signore Vivaldi."

"Then she does not live at the place to which Alfred followed her?" observed Lord Harold, with unfeigned surprise.

"It was not she whom Alfred followed at all. But mind, it was not poor Alfred's fault; and so I do not blame him. The lady whom he did follow, is just of the same height as Angela — and when wrapped up in a cloak and veiled, might in the hurry of the moment be easily taken for the Signora."

"Then who in heaven's name was she?" asked Staunton, scarcely knowing whether to believe his young friend's story or not.

"You know—at least by sight — Mademoiselle d'Alembert?"

"What, Emily Archer? of course I do—and so do a dozen others."

"Isn't she a splendid creature?" asked Saxondale, his ear not having caught Staunton's last words nor his eye having noticed the somewhat sarcastic smile which appeared on his friend's lip. "Having been disappointed in my hope of meeting Angela, it was an immense consolation to fall in with Emily Archer as a substitute. Well, to be brief, she and I have made certain arrangements together; and this morning, after breakfast, she wrote the prettiest, sweetest, and genteelest little billet in the world, telling her friend Mr. Walter that she thanked him for all past kindnesses, but was compelled by circumstances to give him his dismissal."

"Then you have taken her under your protection?" asked Staunton: and as Saxondale nodded an affirmative, he immediately added, "Of course you have abandoned your love-campaign in respect to Signora Vivaldi?"

"Oh, certainly! Miss Archer stipulated that as one of the conditions——"

"And therefore you will not consider it treacherous or unfair on my part if I take up the pursuit which you have thus renounced?" continued Staunton.

"By all means do so," rejoined Edmund. "I am so well pleased with Miss Emily that it is with no great pang I abandon my hopes of the Signora. And now I wish you good luck in the affair you are taking in hand."

There was a passing smile upon Lord Harold's countenance, which seemed to imply that he thought Edmund a very great fool for his pains: but as at this moment Lord Petersfield addressed some particular question to Saxondale, the latter did not notice Staunton's look.

Soon afterwards the gentlemen proceeded to the drawing-room where coffee was served round: and then the whole magnificent suite of state-apartments was thrown open for the dance. Carriages kept rolling up to the doors of Saxondale House, depositing their aristocratic burdens, and then rushing away again to make room for fresh arrivals: so that by ten o'clock the brilliantly-lighted rooms were thronged with an almost countless company; and e

splendid band being in attendance, the alternate quadrille and waltz soon sounded most inspiritingly throughout the mansion.

Lady Saxondale performed the part of a hostess with that dignified but quiet air which belongs to high breeding; and truly magnificent did she appear with her grand beauty set off by all the advantages of a superb toilet. The white ostrich plumes waved gracefully above the head which she carried with a statuesque elegance slightly commingled with hauteur; and no one who now gazed upon that proudly handsome countenance would have for a moment fancied that its serene dignity was but a mask veiling the inward troubles of the soul. In a suite of apartments thronged with splendid specimens of the female sex, Lady Saxondale was assuredly the most superb. There were others more sweetly and interestingly beautiful—such, for example, as the captivating Lady Florina Staunton, or even Lady Saxondale's younger daughter Constance: but there was not one who in Juno-like majesty of form and splendid pride of glorious womanhood, could be pointed out as a rival to Lady Saxondale. Behold her as she now stands, for a few moments a little way apart from the brilliant throng, with one fair hand lightly resting upon the marble-slab of a side-table, surveying the crowds of elegantly dressed men, stately dames, and lovely girls whom she has assembled there; and even the veriest anchorite would be compelled to confess that it were a pity to retire from a world embellished by so superb and magnificent a beauty.

It was during an interval between the dances that Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter, slipped unperceived from the ball-room; and going forth upon the landing, cast a rapid and scrutinizing glance around. Two pages were standing a little way down the staircase, conversing with each other. One of them was Francis Paton, that beautiful youth of eighteen whom we have already described. Juliana called the other page to her, and sent him away on some trifling errand which suggested itself at the moment, and which indeed was a mere pretext to enable her to snatch an opportunity of saying a word to his good-looking companion. The moment he had disappeared down the stairs, Juliana beckoned Frank to approach; and the colour mantled in vivid scarlet upon the youth's countenance as he hastened to obey that summons.

"Frank," said Juliana, her own countenance likewise blushing as she bent upon him the flashing light of her superb dark eyes, "tell me, what was that message you delivered to her ladyship before dinner? I noticed that she seemed annoyed and uneasy; and it has troubled me much."

Juliana might have said, if she had told the truth, that the only trouble she had experienced in the matter was that of the most lively curiosity,—a curiosity, indeed, so intense that she had not been able to restrain herself until the morrow ere she sought to gratify it.

"It was a woman, Miss, who called," replied Frank, almost overcome with bashfulness; "and she would insist upon seeing her ladyship."

"A woman to be thus impertinent!" exclaimed Juliana, her curiosity still more piqued. "What did she want?"

"I do not know, Miss," returned the page, raising his large liquid hazel eyes for a moment to the mantling countenance of the patrician young lady, and then casting down his looks again in greater confusion than before.

"But what sort of a woman was she?" asked Juliana, in a soft tremulous voice that quivered with the same emotions which made her heart throb; for she felt consumed with a devouring passion as she fixed her regards upon the beautiful youth before her.

"She was a very common woman, Miss,—wretchedly dressed—with a cloak and cap. She had no bonnet on——Altogether, I did not like her looks. But I suppose she was some poor woman asking charity or a favour, and not knowing very well how to behave herself."

At this moment the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs were heard; and Juliana, flinging upon the page a look as expressive of a fervid passion as looks could possibly be, turned hurriedly away and passed into an ante-chamber, where she paused for a few minutes to compose herself—for she felt the blush of her fevered sensations still upon her cheeks. Then, with the image of the beautiful page still uppermost in her mind—but also still continuing to wonder what the meaning of that mysterious visit to Lady Saxondale could possibly be—she returned into the state-apartments, where her hand was immediately solicited for the ensuing dance.

We have already said that Mr. Marlow, one of Lord Saxondale's guardians, was a guest at the banquet. His partner Mr. Malton had also been invited; but through pressing business, this gentleman had been unable to reach Saxondale House until the saloons were thrown open for the ball. Though somewhat resembling his partner in personal exterior, he was not of the same bustling and volatile character, but far more precise, cool, and sedately business-like. Shortly after he had made his appearance, Mr. Marlow drew him aside; and they conversed together for a few minutes upon some private matters of their own.

"I shall be unable to come to the office to-morrow," said Mr. Marlow, "as I have got something particular to do at home. And yet you and I, Malton, must manage to have an hour's conversation in the morning relative to that law-suit:"—alluding to the business of which they had been conversing, and which was of great importance to their clients, though of none to the reader.

"Shall I run down to you very early?" asked Mr. Malton.

"Why can't you come home with me to-night?" suggested the bustling Marlow, taking off his kid glove and displaying a splendid diamond ring as he ran his fingers through his hair. "Sleep at my house, and then we can talk over the whole thing at breakfast-time to-morrow. You are a bachelor," he added, laughing, "and have no account to give of your conduct to anybody."

"Well, be it so," responded the junior partner after a few moments' consideration. "When my carriage comes, I will order it to be dismissed."

"And you will take a seat with me in mine," was Mr. Marlow's prompt rejoinder. "We shall leave at midnight: for I can't stand late hours:"—and he played somewhat conceitedly with his superb gold guard-chain.

"Nor I either," responded Mr. Malton.

This little arrangement being entered into, the

two lawyers separated, and proceeded to different parts of the room to mingle amongst the gay and brilliant groups of Lady Saxondale's guests. But we need not extend this chapter nor dwell at any greater length upon the details of the splendid entertainment; but will at once proceed to turn the reader's attention to a place and a scene contrasting marvellously with the sumptuous mansion and the glittering throng whereof we are now taking our leave.

CHAPTER XVI.

LADY BESS.

TRUE to her appointment with Chiffin the Cannibal, Madge Somers crossed the threshold of Solomon Patch's boozing-ken in Agar Town, just as the clock in the tap-room was striking nine, on the same evening on which Lady Saxondale's entertainment took place.

The Cannibal was drinking with a party of his friends when Madge made her appearance in the tap-room; but laying down his pipe and tossing off the remnants of his liquor, the Cannibal at once rose from his seat and followed her up into the room above. This room was specially devoted to the private conferences of the persons frequenting Solomon Patch's house. It was here that many a dark and desperate deed was planned,—here that the perpetrators thereof were wont to assemble afterwards and divide the fruits of their iniquity,—here also that Mr. Patch himself transacted business with his friends when stolen property was to be disposed of. It was a wretched place, Solomon Patch's love of money and niggard disposition preventing him from laying out the few shillings that might have rendered it somewhat decent. But then, on the other hand, it answered the purpose very well: no one grumbled at its rude furniture—its dirty floor and blackened walls: nor were the persons who were accustomed to use the room, of that delicate constitution likely to suffer by the draughts from the broken windows or the places where the absent panes were indifferently stopped up with old rags thrust through. A rude sort of staircase led up to an attic above; and this attic was provided with a bed for the accommodation of any one of Mr. Patch's friends whom circumstances might compel to seek a temporary retirement until some menacing storm was blown over.

It was into the conference-room above described that Madge Somers and Chiffin the Cannibal ascended, the former having obtained a candle from the old landlady.

"Well," said Chiffin as he took a seat upon a rude stool, "I suppose you have brought me my blunt according to promise? I have been thinking a good deal over that adventure of last night——"

"Then I beg you will not think any more of it," interrupted Madge peremptorily. "An agreement is an agreement: the business of last night has ceased to be your affair altogether, and is now mine; so I will thank you not to interfere in my concerns, if you wish us to continue good friends."

The Cannibal was about to give some surly reply, when Madge, thrusting her hand into her pocket, drew forth a quantity of sovereigns which she placed upon the table. The sight of the gold at once made the horrible countenance of the ruffian clear up——that is to say, it cleared up as much as the murky gloom of a thunder-cloud can be said to brighten when the sun shines forth from another part of the heaven upon it.

"Here are your hundred pounds," said Madge: "and now be contented."

"Well, the look of this precious metal, as romance-writers call it," said Chiffin, "is enough to soften a fellow's heart:"—and while he thus spoke he began to finger the gold pieces, counting them over first of all to see that they were right, and then weighing them in his hand. "You have kept your promise, Madge," he continued as he secured the money about his person; "and I have nothing more to say—unless it is to offer to stand a bowl of punch down stairs if you will come and partake of it."

But ere the woman had time to give the negative answer which she was about to return, the door opened, and Lady Bess sauntered with graceful ease into the room. She was apparelled exactly in the same manner as when we previously described her,—her fine person being admirably set off by the close-fitting frock coat, the well made pantaloons, and all the other accessories of her masculine garb. For a moment her magnificent large eyes, with so bright a lustre shining in their black depths, were flung scrutinizingly upon Madge Somers and the Cannibal, as if to penetrate their proceedings at a single glance; and then with that off-hand air of easy negligence and graceful listlessness which generally characterized her, the female highwayman took a seat at the table.

"I hope I am not intruding," she said. "That old scoundrel Solomon told me you were up here closeted together; and as I have got a little business to transact with him I thought there would be no harm in joining you."

"Ah! I suppose it doesn't suit your gentility," growled Chiffin, "to stand lurking about down at the bar, or to go and sit amongst my pals in the tap-room."

"Is it not strange, Chiffin," cried Lady Bess, laughing good-naturedly, and thus displaying the two splendid rows of teeth that graced her rich mouth, "that you always have something complimentary to say to me? And yet I invariably treat you with as much civility as possible."

"Perhaps, you think, more than I deserve," remarked Chiffin, somewhat softened by Lady Bess's open-hearted frankness.

"Under circumstances it certainly is," she responded: "for you scarcely ever say a civil word to me."

"I don't know how it is, but I can't say that I dislike you," resumed Chiffin; "and yet I don't altogether feel myself at home in your presence. You are too fine and grand for me. Besides, you and I never act together."

"Our avocations are so different," exclaimed Lady Bess, with another merry laugh. "But what if I were going to propose something of a grand and startling nature, in which you can assist? Now, Madge, you see the Cannibal's eyes glisten; and he is actually excited with the hint I have thrown out."

"It's because in his heart he feels honoured by this confidence you are going to show him," ob-

served Madge, who keenly and skilfully read the real feeling which had inspired the Cannibal at the moment.

"Honour be hanged!" said Chiffin surlily: then immediately adopting a more conciliatory tone, he hastened to observe, "But come, Lady Bess, if there's anything you can really put in my way, I shan't refuse to accept it; and it might make us better friends."

"Very good: I will explain myself presently," replied the female highwayman: for at this moment old Solomon Patch entered the room.

He was an ill-looking man—shabbily dressed, of sordid appearance, and with a sneaking slyness in the expression of his countenance. The love of gain was as clearly traced in every line of those angular features and that wrinkled face as if his character had been written thereon; and it required no great depth of observation to perceive that there was scarcely any villany from which Solomon Patch would shrink so long as he beheld the certainty of a commensurate reward.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, as he slowly and hesitatingly entered this room—this deferential question not being addressed to either Chiffin or Madge, but to the amazonian beauty.

"Intruding—no!" she exclaimed. "All I want you to do is to take these trinkets which I picked up on the road last night, and give me what according to your ideas you think they are worth." Thus speaking, Lady Bess, with an indifferent and careless air, took from her pocket a watch and chain and three or four finger-rings. "I might have added some beautiful diamond studs to this little parcel of jewellery if I had chosen," she observed with a smile upon the fulness of her ripe and luscious lips: "but I let the poor frightened fellow keep them."

While she was thus speaking, the watch and rings which she had laid upon the table had suddenly become the objects of an earnest and intense gaze on the part of Madge Somers, who at once recognized them as having belonged to her guest of the preceding night—young Lord Saxondale. Chiffin the Cannibal was also contemplating the trinkets—not because he knew them, for he did not—but because it was in the man's nature to feel an interest in anything that was the produce of plunder or other illicit proceedings. Lady Bess was herself looking carelessly at the same objects at the moment; and therefore she did not perceive the attention with which Madge Somers was fixing her eyes on them.

Solomon Patch took them off the table, and bent down towards the light in order to examine them as closely as possible with a view to ascertain their value: then after a long and careful scrutiny, he said in a stammering, hesitating manner, "Well, I don't know—I always like to deal with your ladyship—you are so good and generous: but I really couldn't say more than thirty pounds—and that would be quite a stretch, to oblige you."

"Oh! never mind," said Lady Bess carelessly: "I do not intend to take less than fifty—and as I am in no particular want of money at this moment, I will keep the trinkets till I am. Or perhaps I may take a gallop down to Gravesend one of these fine mornings and see what your brother Israel will offer."

"Stop, stop, my lady!" exclaimed old Solomon, evidently not wishing to let a good bargain slip out of his hands. "I—I—don't mind saying forty—and that's the very outside."

"Give me over the things, you old scoundrel," said Lady Bess, more good-naturedly than angrily. "I am resolved not to part with them under the fifty."

Solomon Patch continued turning the watch and chain over and over in his hand: then he examined the rings one after the other: then he recurred to the watch—opening it, examining the works, and in short scrutinizing it most minutely in every point. At length, after several fruitless attempts to beat down Lady Bess in her price, he gave her the fifty pounds she demanded and walked off with the spoil.

"Now," said Chiffin, as soon as Solomon Patch had quitted the room, "what about this little business that you have been talking of? Something that you and I can do together, you know, and which is to make us better friends than we have yet been?"

"Oh! you must not think," exclaimed Lady Bess, somewhat haughtily, "that I want to curry favour with you, Chiffin. But if I should be able to let you into a good thing," she added with her wonted frankness of humour, "perhaps you will in future adopt a more civil tone towards me?"

"Well, I don't know but what I should give you my vote if the whole lot of us that frequent Sol Patch's were to elect a captain. So you see I hav'n't really any particular dislike to you, Lady Bess:"—and as Chiffin thus spoke he endeavoured to look as pleasant as possible.

"There!" said Madge, addressing herself to the female highwayman: "I am sure after *that* you won't refuse to throw a good thing in Chiffin's way."

"Not I!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "And now then to the point. Somewhere near Edmonton there lives a lawyer named Marlow. He is very rich—thinks a great deal of himself—and bedecks his person with very valuable jewellery. He has got a diamond ring on his finger that was presented to him by some lady to whose son he is guardian; and this ring is said to be worth two hundred guineas at least. Then his watch is set round with brilliants—he has a splendid diamond pin in his shirt-frill—and in his pocket-book he always carries a good round sum in bank-notes. Now, all these particulars I have ascertained direct from his coachman: no matter how. Well, this Mr. Marlow has gone to a party to-night; and I have positive information that he has got all his splendid jewellery about him—because it is to a first-rate house at the West End that he has gone—indeed to the very lady's to whose son he is guardian. In a word, between twelve and one o'clock this night it is my intention to ease him of those splendid jewels as well as his purse and pocket-book, on the road to Edmonton."

"And you want me to help you, I suppose?" asked the Cannibal, with a grim smile of satisfaction at the prospect thus held forth.

"Precisely so," returned Lady Bess. "But all the assistance you need render will be merely a pretence, just for the sake of keeping up appearances."

"Ah, I see!" observed Chiffin. "I must make believe to keep the coachman in awe while you do the rifling business with his master——isn't that it?"

"You have read my purpose exactly," responded Lady Bess. "And now, do you agree? The booty shall be disposed of to old Solomon, and of course we will divide the produce equally—that is to say, leaving a third share for the coachman."

"I like the business, and the business likes me," responded Chiffin. "But is it a safe place to do a thing of this sort? I mean along the road there, down towards Tottenham or Edmonton?"

"Safe!" echoed Lady Bess, her full lips wreathing in scornful contempt of danger: then as a sudden recollection struck her, she laughingly exclaimed, "Why, those things that I have just sold to old Patch were picked up on that very same road last night. Ha! ha! ha! it was one of the finest adventures you ever heard of in the whole course of your life. I was galloping out of London along the Seven Sisters Road, when I met a young fellow —never mind his name, although he told it to me—who was wandering about in a benighted state. So I offered him a bed at my house——"

"Where do you live, then?" asked Chiffin, who with his arm resting on the table and his head bent forward, was listening attentively to the amazon's tale.

"Never mind where I live," she responded with an arch smile. "Suffice it for you to know that I pretended for the nonce to live in that neighbourhood, and invited the youngster home. He accepted the invitation, and got up behind me on my horse. I could perceive that when he held me round the waist he discovered that I was not exactly of the sex I at first seemed: for I felt him trembling like an aspen leaf. How I laughed in my sleeve! But our ride did not continue very far: for in a few minutes we reached a convenient part of the road, where it is quite lonely, and there I threw my gentleman off and made him surrender up those trinkets which I have just handed over to Solomon."

At this moment Lady Bess, who had been talking in a careless off-hand manner, without addressing herself particularly either to the Cannibal or Madge, suddenly raised her eyes and was perfectly struck by the singular look which that woman was fixing upon her. Lady Bess could not possibly penetrate the meaning of that look: it was so strange—so sinister—so unfathomable.

"Ah! then it was a good night's work for you?" exclaimed Madge, instantaneously resuming her wonted aspect, and endeavouring to appear as if she had not been excited by any extraordinary emotion.

"Yes—a tolerably good night's work," answered the female highwayman, not choosing to question the woman—at least on that occasion—as to the cause of the strangeness of her manner a moment back. "Besides this gold," she went on to say, leisurely gathering up the money she had received from Patch, and which she had until now left lying upon the table with a careless indifference concerning it, "I got a well-filled purse from my deluded companion of that double ride on horseback. Poor fellow! he was frightened out of his wits; and I am very sure that he will not go and confess to his mamma," she added, laughing ironically, "that he was robbed by a woman. But now I shall take my departure. Chiffin, you will meet me at the bridge over the canal half-an-hour after midnight. You know where I mean—in the road leading to Tottenham."

"I know," responded Chiffin; "and I shall be there before my time. It won't take much more than an hour's walk: so if I leave here at a quarter past eleven it will be all right."

Lady Bess now quitted the wretched-looking room; and descending the stairs, issued from the public-house: then mounting her horse, she rode away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAWYERS.

It was a rather dark night—for there was no moon, and the clouds that were flitting over the face of heaven, borne on the wings of a somewhat strong breeze, obscured the beams of the twinkling stars. The lamps of Mr. Marlow's carriage were however lighted; and rapidly was the vehicle proceeding along the Tottenham Road, driven by the treacherous coachman through whose agency the contemplated robbery had been suggested. The carriage was of that kind which in a former instance we have already described as a *brougham*: it therefore had no footman either standing or seated behind, the coachman being the only servant attached to it.

Inside, Mr. Marlow and Mr. Malton were lounging comfortably back, conversing upon the gaieties which they had so recently quitted at Saxondale House, and intermingling their discourse with a few business-remarks relative to the various matters which their extensive office had to conduct. For the firm of Marlow and Malton was one of the most eminent as well as the wealthiest in London,—all their business being chiefly with clients belonging to the highest orders of society.

The equipage had just crossed the canal bridge, and was proceeding at a slower pace down the somewhat steep slope which the road takes in the direction of Tottenham, when the two lawyers were suddenly startled by the quick trampling of a horse gallopping up to the side of the carriage, and a peremptory command to the coachman to stop. At the same instant they saw a fellow with a huge club bound from the side of the road and spring up on the box; where, seizing upon the coachman, he warned him with terrible threats not to offer the slightest resistance. The coachman did not mean to do anything of the sort, he being well prepared beforehand for this facetious portion of the drama.

Mr. Malton, who was on the side nearest to the mounted highwayman, instantaneously let down the window, and with a quick glance surveyed the daring individual whose person was plainly visible by the light of the carriage-lamps. Nevertheless, the keen eyes of Mr. Malton did not detect the real sex of the highwayman; nor could he even catch the slightest glimpse of Lady Bess's countenance, inasmuch as she had put on a black mask just before stopping the carriage. But Mr. Malton *did* perceive that the mounted bandit was of somewhat slender make, and at all events afforded no outward indications of any extraordinary degree of physical strength. Such was the idea that immediately

struck him as the result of the first few moments' survey: and he had little leisure to regard her any longer—for he was almost instantaneously called upon to some prompt and decisive course of action by the demand which Lady Bess at once made for the surrender up of purses and jewels.

She had not expected to find two gentlemen seated inside the vehicle; and on discovering that there were two she immediately apprehended resistance. Therefore, drawing forth a pocket-pistol, she presented it at the window, saying in the roughest tone to which she could possibly disguise her voice, "Quick, quick, gentlemen! Your purses, your watches, and so forth!"

"No—by heaven! not without a struggle for it!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who was a man of undaunted courage; and as he spoke he dashed open the door and sprang forth from the vehicle with a gold-headed cane in his hand.

The abrupt opening of the door made Lady Bess's horse suddenly shy and veer round; and she, being at the instant unprepared for such a movement, was thrown heavily. Mr. Malton, with admirable presence of mind, clutched the horse's bridle with one hand, while with the other he snatched up the pistol which Lady Bess had let drop and which had happened not to explode. Mr. Marlow, the elder partner, encouraged by the resolute bravery of his friend, likewise sprang forth; and perceiving at a glance that the highwayman who lay upon the ground was either stunned or killed by the fall, he seized upon the legs of Chiffin the Cannibal who had mounted to the box.

"This scoundrel is killed!" ejaculated Mr. Malton, alluding to Lady Bess, who lay quite motionless.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Chiffin: and violently disengaging himself from the hold which Mr. Marlow had fastened upon him, he sprang down from the box and rushed away as fast as his legs would carry him.

Mr. Marlow was thrown to the ground by the sudden violence of the Cannibal: but instantly rising to his feet, he shook himself, not merely for the purpose of casting off the dust which his garments had gathered by rolling in it, but likewise to assure himself that he had no broken bones. While however he was still somewhat uncertain on the latter point, his thoughts were quickly startled into another channel by an ejaculation which burst from the lips of his partner.

"Why, by heaven, it is a woman!" exclaimed Mr. Malton, who had just stooped down to ascertain whether the highwayman was actually killed or only stunned by the severe fall experienced from the horse.

"A woman!" echoed Mr. Marlow, likewise stooping down. "Aye, and a very handsome one into the bargain!"—for his partner had plucked the black mask from her countenance. "But, dear me! I am very much mistaken if I don't know this face ——yes, and that horse too——why, to be sure, I cannot be deceived! I have seen this woman—a lady I always thought her—riding about Tottenham and Edmonton on that very horse—but not in this attire though—in a proper female riding-habit. John, hav'n't you seen this lady?"

"Never mind asking any questions now," said Mr. Malton somewhat impatiently. "See, she lives—she opens her eyes!"

And it was so. Lady Bess had been merely stunned by the fall; and consciousness rapidly returning, she became aware of the position in which she was placed—a prisoner in the hands of the two attorneys.

"Are you hurt, young woman?" demanded Mr. Malton with a sternness that was only tempered by a feeling of humanity.

"No—I think not," answered Lady Bess, rising to her feet: then, while she was rapidly calculating the chances of escape, Mr. Malton seized her by the coat-collar while Mr. Marlow clutched her by the arm.

"This is a deed on your part which we cannot overlook," said the former.

"Certainly not," promptly added the latter. "As lawyers we must obey the law; and the law forbids us to let a felon escape."

"I can scarcely expect any forbearance at your hands under the circumstances," responded Lady Bess; "and I am not going to ask it. Do with me as you will:"—and she not only spoke in a firm tone, but likewise displayed a resolute dauntlessness of manner which quite astonished the two lawyers

"What on earth are we to do with her?" asked Mr. Marlow.

"Take her on to Edmonton and give her to the police," was Mr. Malton's reply.

"You are known, young woman—you are known," said Marlow, as talkative as he was bustling, and now labouring under the greatest excitement. "I have seen you galloping about on this splendid dark chesnut of your's—but in a costume more befitting your sex. Why, 'pon my soul! I took you for a lady. I say, John, I have often noticed her to you—and I remember you mentioned her name once. What was it?"

"Sir," immediately interposed Lady Bess, who was chivalrously resolved to screen the treacherous servant, and thus save him from the perplexity of having to answer questions by the replies to which he might fear to compromise her, and thus in his hesitation draw suspicion on himself; "I will at once candidly and frankly inform you that I live near Tottenham—close at hand indeed—and that I pass by the name of Mrs. Chandos."

"Chandos, to be sure!" ejaculated the volatile Marlow: "that is it!"

"And now," Lady Bess immediately went on to observe, "although I seek no forbearance at your hands, I will request this little favour—that you permit me to call at my abode ere you consign me to the custody of the authorities, so that I may acquaint my servant with the position in which I am placed."

"Well, I see no harm in that," exclaimed Mr. Marlow. "Eh, Malton—what do you say?"

"I do not wish to behave harshly or cruelly to the unhappy young woman," was the latter gentleman's more measured response.

"My house is yonder—the white cottage which you see amongst the trees in that lane to the left:"—and Lady Bess extended her arm in the direction which she indicated.

"Well then, how shall we manage?" exclaimed Marlow. "Oh, I know! We will fasten the horse by the bridle to the carriage, and take our prisoner inside with us. Here, you hold her tight, Malton,

while I dispose of the horse. 'Pon my soul, it is a splendid animal! I have often admired it—but little thought it was ridden by a highwayman—or rather a highway-woman."

While thus chattering, Mr. Marlow attached the horse's bridle to the back of the carriage; and that being done, Lady Bess was desired to enter the vehicle. This she at once did without the slightest indication of any failure of courage. Then the two lawyers being likewise ensconced within the vehicle, the equipage drove away.

In a few minutes it reached the bottom of the slope; and passing out of the main-road, entered the lane in which Lady Bess's residence was situated. This was soon gained; and the carriage, with the dark chesnut trotting behind it, stopped in front of a neat cottage almost embowered in trees and having a very picturesque appearance.

"Who the deuce would have thought," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, as he bustled out of the vehicle, "that this beautiful place was occupied by so lawless a character? 'Pon my soul, it appears like a dream! Young woman, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—such a good-looking person as you are——"

"Come, come, Marlow, don't let us reproach her," interrupted Mr. Malton, as he held tight hold of Lady Bess's arm while she descended from the vehicle. "She will be punished enough, I dare say."

"Will you let me take my horse to the stable?" she inquired: "for I have no groom on the premises. A man who lives at yon hut"—and she pointed to a little cottage at a short distance—"is in the habit of coming to attend upon it."

"Oh! yes—we are not warring against the horse," ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Here—I will soon help you——where is the stable?——round at the back?"

At this moment the front door was opened; and a woman of about thirty, and exceedingly respectable in appearance, came out. By the light which streamed forth from the passage of the house and which blended with that of the carriage-lamps, this woman exchanged a rapid glance with Mr. Marlow's coachman: but although Lady Bess perceived and understood it, neither of the two lawyers did.

"Rosa," said Lady Bess, "do not be frightened—I am in some little trouble, and shall have to go away with these gentlemen. I have had a sad fall from my horse too, and have wounded my right leg. I feel that it is bleeding—and indeed the blood has run down into my boot. But never mind."

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed Rosa, rushing forward and clasping her hands as if in despair: then stooping down, she felt the amazon's pantaloons, exclaiming, "Gracious! you are indeed bleeding!"

"In that case," said Mr. Malton, "we must allow you time to let your servant examine your injury and dress it. I have already said that we do not wish to use unnecessary harshness."

"I thank you, sir, for you courtesy—or I should say your generosity:"—and Lady Bess appeared to speak with a sincere feeling.

The horse was now speedily led round to the stable, where the saddle and bridle were taken off by Mr. Marlow's own hands: and then the two lawyers, Lady Bess, and the servant entered the house. An elegantly-furnished parlour received them; and Messrs. Marlow and Malton could not help exchanging a look of astonishment at the evidences of a refined taste which the room presented to their view. Several good pictures, three or four beautiful little alabaster groups of statues, vases of flowers, and musical instruments, ornamented the place. Rosa hastened to light the wax-candles on the mantel; and then Lady Bess said, "You will permit me, gentlemen, to ascend with my servant to my chamber for a few minutes?"

"Ah! but what guarantee have we against your escape?" at once cried Mr. Marlow.

"I know not," returned the female highwayman, with an appearance of the utmost frankness: "unless you station yourselves on the landing outside."

"Well, this we must do then, I suppose," exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

"Yes—there is no alternative," added Mr. Malton, who, though really regretting to be compelled to proceed to extremities against this extraordinary woman, was nevertheless one of those scrupulous and punctilious individuals who imagine that severity in such cases is a duty which they owe to society.

"Lead the way, Rosa," said Lady Bess; "and I will follow with these gentlemen."

The servant accordingly issued from the room, holding in her hand the chamber-candle with which she had previously lighted the tapers on the mantel; and the two lawyers, keeping Lady Bess between them, proceeded up a handsomely carpetted staircase to the landing above.

"This is my room," said the amazon, pointing to the door which Rosa had just opened; "and you will perhaps convince yourselves that it has no other outlet."

"Yes—that I will do," said the volatile Mr. Marlow: and he hastened into the chamber while Lady Bess remained outside on the landing with Mr. Malton.

"It's all right," exclaimed the senior partner as he came forth again: "there's no possible escape, unless she leaps out of the window or gets up the chimney: but the former is too high from the ground, and the latter too narrow."

"Then we leave you for a few minutes with your servant," said Mr. Malton.

Lady Bess accordingly passed into the bed-chamber, while the two lawyers staid outside upon the landing.

"Fear nothing," said the amazonian lady, in the lowest possible whisper to her servant the instant they were thus alone together. "Your cousin is unsuspected—I have screened him. My plans are all arranged. And now at once begin talking loud, as if you were lamenting my misfortunes while dressing my wound."

The truth is that Lady Bess had no wound at all—nor had she sustained any injury beyond a slight contusion or two from the fall in the road. The idea of the wound and the ghastly story of the blood streaming into her boot, was a ready invention on her part, and which Rosa had at once comprehended, for the purpose of obtaining this opportunity of ascending to her chamber in company with the servant.

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed Rosa, affecting a voice of lamentation and distress: "what

trouble you have got yourself into! How did all this happen? What does it mean? Well, well, poor dear lady, I won't worry you. I dare say you will tell me all about it another time. But, O dear me! what a wound! Why you must have cut yourself with a sharp flintstone, or something. You would certainly have bled to death if you had gone without having the wound dressed. And the boot too—almost filled with blood! the stocking dripping wet! dear me, dear me!"

In this strain did Rosa go on talking, at the same time treading about the room and making a clatter with the things just as if she were in the excitement of a tremendous bustle to get all that was necessary under the circumstances. But in the mean while what was Lady Bess herself doing?

The instant she had given those hurried and softly whispered instructions to Rosa, she delayed not in carrying into execution the plan which had suggested itself to her while she was arriving thither in the carriage. She looked at her watch: it wanted exactly twenty-five minutes to two o'clock. No time to lose! Taking a very small scrap of paper, she wrote thereon the following lines:—

Deletzyd—szcdpd.
Ozgpc—Oz dzxpestyr ez aczgp * hld le jzfc azfdp estp trse.
Ebpyej xtyfepd ez ehz.

Having folded up this little scrap of paper into the smallest possible compass, she tied a small piece of silken thread around it; which being done, she hastily whispered to Rosa, "Make some good rattling noise while I open the window."

Rosa, instantaneously obeying this order, commenced no inconsiderable din with the basin and jug and other things on the washing-stand, during which clatter Lady Bess opened the casement, the noise thereof being drowned in the din of the crockery-ware. She now reached forth her hand, and took in a large wicker bird-cage which hung just outside the window. This cage contained

two beautiful doves of the carrier-breed. One of these doves the amazonian lady took forth from the cage, and in less than a minute tied the little scrap of paper with the silken cord under its wing. She then opened her hand, and the messenger-bird flew out of the window, instantaneously disappearing in the obscurity of the night.

Meanwhile, in pursuance of another rapidly-whispered command from her mistress, Rosa had fastened the two sheets of the bed together, and had tied one extremity to the bed-post, which was near the casement.

"In two or three days I shall be back again, safe and sound. Don't fear; nothing can be done to you—and your cousin John is unsuspected!"

Having whispered these words, Lady Bess lost not another instant in passing herself out of the casement; and with wondrous agility and skill, she glided down the twisted sheets, so that with but a slight fall she reached the ground in safety.

To hasten to the stable—put the saddle and bridle on the horse—and lead forth the noble animal, was now the work of but a couple of minutes; then vaulting on its back, Lady Bess was borne away like an arrow shot from a bow.

In the meantime Rosa had gone on talking in the room in the same strain as before, and precisely as if her mistress was still there. The two solicitors, who were out on the landing, failed not to catch most of what the woman uttered, although for delicacy's sake they had not approached nearer to the door than the narrowness of the landing rendered necessary. All that we have described from the moment Lady Bess entered her chamber with Rosa, until she flitted away on the back of her noble steed, barely occupied a quarter of an hour; and that was no great length of time to examine a wound—wash it—fasten bandages on it—and allow for taking off and putting on those garments that it was necessary to remove and change. At least such was the calculation made relative to the lapse of minutes by the two lawyers. Yet, towards the end of the interval named, a feeling of uneasiness and a sense of misgiving began to creep into the minds of both. Not that they thought Lady Bess was too long in her chamber; but those continuous outpourings of lamentations, ejaculations, and comments on the part of Rosa, added to to the din she had created with the crockery-ware, struck them as being suspicious: for it all looked as if the woman were playing a part,—a part too which she was now overdoing. They were therefore just on the point of knocking at the door, and insisting upon Lady Bess coming forth, when they were struck with consternation on hearing the sudden trampling of the horse's feet as he was being led from the stable.

"By heaven, we are tricked?" exclaimed Marlow: and without ceremony he rushed into the bed-chamber.

The open window and the rope of sheets which Rosa was just dragging in, told the tale.

"Wretch!" cried Marlow, "you have aided your mistress's escape! But you shall go to prison for her!"

"Let her alone," exclaimed Mr. Malton. "We will punish the guilty one yet:"—and he rushed down the stairs, closely followed by his partner.

"Why did you not stop her? Don't you see that she has escaped?" cried Marlow, addressing himself fiercely to the coachman.

"I saw some one, sir, gallop round from the back of the house and bolt away like a shot," answered the coachman: "but how could I possibly stop her? I scarcely knew who it could be till she was out of sight: and then it was only suspicion, for she whisked by at such a rate."

"True!" cried Marlow; "the window is at the back of the house—the stable also. Well, John, I was wrong to blame you. But now, what is to be done?" he demanded, turning to his partner. "We shall be the laughing-stock of all London if we let her escape us thus."

"Besides," added Mr. Malton, "it is more than ever imperative that the outraged laws should be satisfied."

"But what *is* to be done?" again asked Mr. Marlow, more excited than before.

"Depend upon it she means to get out of the country," responded the junior partner after a few moments' reflection. "I tell you what we must do. We will go on to your house, and snatch a few hours' sleep—then off by the first trains in the morning—one of us to Dover and the other to Liverpool. France and America—these are the alternatives for this desperate woman!"

"Yes—that is our course," returned Marlow. "I would not for a thousand guineas that she escaped us in the long run."

The two lawyers then entered the carriage, which immediately drove away to Mr. Marlow's mansion, which was about a mile distant.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSENGER-BIRD.

A LITTLE beyond Gravesend there stood a small public-house, in a somewhat lonely spot, though by the side of the main road. The landlord of this place, which bore the name of the *Dancing Bear*, was called Israel Patch, and was a younger brother of the keeper of the boozing-ken in London. Not merely was he the brother of Solomon, but Israel was of kindred character and pursuits,—his public-house being the resort of all the desperate characters of the district, especially the smugglers belonging to the Thames and Medway. The *Dancing Bear* had long been the object of suspicion on the part of the local authorities; but so cunningly had Israel managed matters, that he had never done any overt act, which could be positively brought home to him.

Israel Patch was a widower, but had a grown-up daughter living with him to superintend his establishment. She was a woman of about thirty, remarkably ugly, and in every way of a character fitted to aid her father in his money-making and nefarious pursuits. Her Christian name was Rebecca; but she was universally known amongst the frequenters of the house by the diminutive of *Becky*.

We must now observe that Israel Patch slept in a little room behind his bar on the ground-floor: but Becky slept in an attic quite on the top of the house. This attic had no flat ceiling to separate it from the sloping roof, but may be described as being covered only by the roof itself—in plain terms, it was just beneath the tiles. On a flat portion of this roof there appeared a very

singular contrivance—namely, a little trap-door of a foot square, made of a piece of wood not much thicker than a good stout cardboard. It was retained by two little hinges on one side; and as it opened downward, it had a very slight and flexible steel spring fixed underneath to keep it shut. As a matter of course, if this spring were taken away the little trap-door would drop downward; and it must likewise be understood that the spring was so slight that while it was but just strong enough to sustain the door, the slightest weight touching the door on the uppermost side would make it sink down. But this was not quite all; for a little bell was suspended to the rafters close by the trap-door; and by another simple contrivance it was so arranged that if the trap-door opened by being pressed downward it caused this bell to ring. Every night, before retiring to rest, Rebecca Patch opened the little trap-door; and thrusting her arm through to the roof, drew in three small saucers. One she filled with water—the second with tares or parched peas—and the third with salt; then having done this, she put the saucers out upon the roof again in a little sort of wooden recess or hutch, the object of which was merely to prevent the salt from being saturated with wet in case of rain. This was Rebecca's nightly duty, and which she fulfilled with the utmost regularity.

We may now continue our tale. It was two o'clock in the morning, when Becky Patch was suddenly startled from her sleep by the tinkling of the little bell; and though its sound could scarcely have awakened any person under ordinary circumstances, yet by dint of habit the least note thereof would arouse up Israel Patch's daughter as effectually as if a cannon were fired close by her ears. Springing from her couch, Becky instantaneously lighted a candle, and coaxingly extended her arm towards a pigeon which now appeared perched on the upper rail of a chair immediately under the little trap-door. The bird, with instinctive tameness, seemed to recognise a known friend, and immediately flew on the woman's wrist. She caressed and addressed it in fondling terms: then she refreshed it with water—and having done this, looked beneath its wing. Thence she unfastened the little scrap of paper which was tied there; and calculating for a moment the day of the month, muttered to herself, "The letter L is the key."

Then she hastily glaced over the contents of the billet, upon which she made a cross with a pen; and having forthwith folded it up again, she replaced it under the bird's wing. This being done, she gave the feathered messenger some peculiar kind of food which she always had in readiness in the room; and the little carrier being thus refreshed, was put forth through the trap-door again. It immediately took wing and sped away on its important errand.

"Twenty minutes to two when the bird was sent off," muttered Rebecca to herself: then as she took an old silver watch from under her pillow and saw that it was now about ten minutes past two, she observed, "There's plenty of time."

She then put on some clothing, and descending the stairs, proceeded to the little room where her father slept.

"Well, what is it?" exclaimed Israel Patch, as he started up in his couch.

"A message," responded his daughter. "Lady Bess has sent it. You must have a horse in readiness. The despatch is dated twenty minutes to two—and it is now nearly a quarter past."

"What a time the bird has been in coming!" ejaculated Patch.

"No such thing," rejoined his daughter. "The dove was here in twenty minutes after it was sent on the wing; and that is doing more than a mile a minute, taking the distance from Lady Bess's to this place. It is me that have delayed somewhat in coming down, as I saw that there was no hurry. Besides, I had to feed the bird—hadn't I?"

"Well, you can go up to bed again. I will dress myself, get the horse in readiness, and wait."

Rebecca Patch left her father the candle which she had brought with her; and then remounting the stairs, gained her attic and lay down to rest once more.

Rapid as the flight of that pigeon which bore the mysterious billet beneath its wing, must we transport the reader to another public-house much farther along the same road. Indeed, this latter was about four miles on the London side of Canterbury. It was situated on the summit of Boughton Hill, at no great distance from a village, but completely isolated therefrom. The sign raised upon the top of a tall post, was daubed with such an effigy of a *Red Dragon* as the painter's imagination had suggested. The house was of sombre and dilapidated appearance, with so suspicious a look that no solitary traveller with a well-filled purse in his pocket would choose such a hostel as a resting-place for the night. It was kept by a man and his wife named Dean; and they, as the reader may suspect, were not a whit more particular how they made money than either Solomon Patch in London or his brother Israel, near Gravesend. They had a son—a lad of about eighteen, whose Christian name was Joseph. He was an intelligent, shrewd, keen fellow, having well profited by his parents' example in such wrong-sided experiences of the world as he was likely to glean therefrom.

This lad slept by himself up in a garret—or rather a sort of loft on the top of the house; and here might be observed precisely the same curious apparatus fixed in the roof as we have described in reference to the attic at the *Dancing Bear*. There was the little trap-door lightly sustained by the steel spring—the small bell—and the hutch with the three saucers on the tiles outside. With the same regularity as Rebecca Patch observed in replenishing those saucers, did Joe Dean perform the same duty; and with equal sensitiveness was he ready to start up from his slumbers at the slightest summons of the metallic tongue of the monitor-bell. Above the head of his truckle-bed a common pinchbeck watch was suspended by a dirty riband to a nail fastened in the wall.

The hands of that watch indicated that it was exactly half-past two o'clock, on that same night—or rather morning—of which we are speaking, when Joe Dean was suddenly awakened from his sleep by the tinkling chime of the bell. He started up lighted his candle, and took the messenger-bird which having alighted on the trap-door, had sunk down with it into the room. Then ensued precisely the same process as we have already de-

scribed at the *Dancing Bear*. Joe Dean, having first of all given the bird some water, detached the billet from beneath its wing—read its contents—made a mark upon it with a pen—folded it up again—and attached it once more to the pinion of the feathered messenger. Having fed and caressed the dove, he let it loose again through the trap-door; and away it sped on the third and last stage of its aerial journey. The lad, having noticed the time by his watch, thereupon went down stairs and communicated to his father the nature of the message which had just been received.

Again must we transport the reader's attention to some distance; and this time we halt at Dover. There, in one of the principal streets, was a tavern of respectable appearance, bearing the sign of the *Admiral's Head*. It was kept by an old man named Marshall, who in his younger days had served on board one of the privateers which Dover in the war-time was wont to send forth to prey upon the French maritime commerce. His father had been the owner and captain of the privateer, and had amassed some little money, with which at the Peace he had established himself at the *Admiral's Head*. Robert Marshall, the present owner of the place, was considered to be a respectable man enough. His house was well frequented; and he was known to be comfortable in his circumstances. He was always regular in his attendance at church—subscribed to charities—sent the clergyman of the parish a handsome present at Christmas—and never had any complaints made against his house on the score or irregularity or disorder. He therefore stood uncommonly well with the leading persons in the town; and if a whisper did now and then circulate that old Bob Marshall had excellent French brandy in his establishment which had never passed the Custom House, or that his wife and daughters went to church on Sundays in French silks, gloves, and shoes, upon which no duty had ever been paid to the British government,—Bob Marshall was not wanting in influential friends to take up the cudgels on his behalf and defend him against what they declared to be a most scandalous imputation.

Mr. Marshall had three daughters, whose ages averaged from about eighteen to twenty-four; and very fine, good-looking, and genteel young women they were. The eldest, whose Christian name was Catherine—familiarly abbreviated into Kate—had from her girlhood been very fond of keeping poultry, pigeons, and other favourites of the feathered tribe in the large stable-yard in the rear of the tavern. Especially had she a very choice and beautiful breed of doves, to which she was greatly attached; and though some of the neighbours found that these birds were wont to get upon the tops of their houses and displace the tiles, they never complained angrily, because old Marshall was invariably so ready to have any such damage repaired at his own expense, and Miss Kate was sure to make compensation by sending a fat turkey or a brace of pullets as a propitiation at Christmas. But of all the friends and acquaintances of the Marshalls who were aware of the eldest young lady's fondness for the feathered tribe, not one of them was ever admitted to the knowledge of the circumstance that she had a bed-chamber prettily fitted up in the highest storey of the house, and that in the roof of this chamber there were precisely the same contrivances as those which we have already explained at the *Red Dragon* on Boughton Hill, and the *Dancing Bear* near Gravesend. Yet such was the fact: and in that neat little but somewhat airily situated chamber, did Kate Marshall sleep; and whenever the tinkling bell sounded she was as ready to spring from her couch as either Joe Dean or Becky Patch at their respective habitations.

An elegant little French time-piece standing upon the chest of drawers, intimated that it wanted ten minutes to three o'clock, when the tinkling summons was given; and Miss Kate was suddenly startled from a very pleasant dream in which the image of her intended husband—the captain of a small trading vessel—was conspicuous. Leaping from the couch, she at once perceived by the aid of her night-lamp, which she always kept burning, a beautiful carrier-pigeon upon a rail a couple of feet below the trap-door. Her plump white arm was immediately outstretched to receive the little messenger; and the next moment the sweet bird was fondly nestling in its kind friend's bosom. Then she gave it water; and detaching the little billet from beneath its wing, hastily opened it. A small manuscript-book which she took from a drawer, and which was filled with dates, references, and initial letters, promptly refreshed her memory so as to supply the key to the reading of the scroll, which without such a clue would necessarily have been a mere jargon as incomprehensible as the Egyptian hieroglyphics. Having made herself acquainted with the words upon the paper, she proceeded to administer food to the bird. This being done, she fondled and caressed it again for a minute or two, and then let it escape through the trap-door in the roof of her chamber.

Kate Marshall now hastily slipped on some clothing, and stealing down stairs, knocked gently at the chamber where her father and mother slept. Mr. Marshall immediately rose, put on a dressing-gown, and admitted his daughter.

"A message, I suppose?" he at once said as he entered the room.

"From Lady Bess," responded Kate. "Here it is. The key is the letter L. The pigeon was sent off at twenty minutes to two, and arrived here at ten minutes to three—one hour and ten minutes in all!"

"And what's the distance, Kate?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"Why, mother, by the road, Dover is seventy-two miles from London, you know," responded the daughter; "and then allowing that Lady Bess's cottage is five miles from London, the whole distance would be seventy-seven. But then, as the bird flies, it would not be much more than seventy, making a mile a minute, inclusive of the short stoppages at the two stations on the road."

While Miss Kate was thus speaking, her father had decyphered the scrap of paper, and had then burnt it by the flame of the candle.

"Well, there is plenty of time to tutor your sisters and the servants what to say," the old man immediately observed. "Some hours must elapse before she will be here, although with the relays she has ordered she will no doubt gallop

like the wind. The little bird has performed its message well: for the two marks were made in; the corner of the paper —were they not?"

"Yes—in the usual way," responded Kate "and therefore there is no doubt that the pigeon stopped both at Gravesend and Boughton."

"Well, you can go up to bed again, Kate," said her father. "But be up by six o'clock, and then we will arrange what is to be said."

"Yes—but did you not observe," asked the young woman, "that something is to be done at once, to prove——"

"To be sure! I have it," exclaimed the astute Marshall. "I know what I will do. Leave it all to me—and you go up to bed, Kate."

His daughter accordingly left the room, and Mr. Marshall at once proceeded to dress himself with the utmost despatch. He then quitted the chamber, telling his wife that he should not be many minutes absent. Descending the stairs, he opened the front door of the tavern, taking the key in his pocket so as to be able to let himself in again; and hurrying along the street, at length stopped at a house where the coloured lamp burning over the door indicated the abode of a surgeon. Marshall rang the night-bell with some degree of violence; and in a few minutes the door was opened by the medical man's assistant.

"Hallo! is that you, Mr. Marshall?" he exclaimed, immediately recognizing the tavern-keeper. "Is there anything the matter up at the *Admiral's Head*?"

"Yes—a lady who arrived last evening has been seized with a fit. She's a little better now, as my daughters are attending upon her: but I want you to give me a composing draught, or something of the kind, so as to prevent a relapse. I am sorry to have disturbed you——"

"Don't mention it, Mr. Marshall," immediately exclaimed the assistant: "it's all in the way of business. Come into the surgery, and I will see what I can do for you—unless you think it is a case for which I had better call up Mr. Hood:"—alluding to his master.

"No, not at all," rejoined the tavern-keeper. "I dare say you can give something that will answer the purpose, if I describe what sort of a fit it was."

"Oh, certainly!" replied the assistant; "and then Mr. Hood will call round in the morning and see the lady."

While thus speaking, the assistant led the way into the surgery; and old Marshall described the ordinary symptoms of an hysterical fit. The assistant speedily compounded a draught; and as he wrote out the label to put upon the bottle, he asked, "What name shall I say?"

"Mrs. Chandos," was old Marshall's prompt answer.

The name was accordingly written upon the label; and Marshall, thanking the assistant for his attention, took his departure. Returning to his house, he ascended to his chamber, undressed himself again, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JOURNEY.

We must now return to Lady Bess, whom we left at the moment when seated on her gallant steed she fled from her cottage in the manner already described. Making the best of her way into London, she crossed Blackfriar's Bridge, and proceeded straight for the Kent Road. In an hour and a quarter from the time she had quitted the cottage she entered upon Blackheath. There she walked her horse—although the noble animal, as if instinctively aware of its mistress's need, appeared impatient to career onward again.

The dauntless amazon was in the highest possible spirits, not only at the achievement she had already performed in effecting her escape from the lawyers, but likewise at the measures she had taken to disentangle herself in the long run from the meshes of the law and be able to turn round and laugh in their faces. She thought of Turpin's memorable ride to York—an exploit which had saved him from the strong arm of justice on that occasion, it being held impossible for a man who appeared at York at daybreak to have committed a crime in London on the preceding evening—the distance being close on two hundred miles! But Lady Bess's stratagem, as she had devised it, was if possible still more ingenious; and the evidence to be eventually given in her favour, would be still more conclusive, as the reader will presently see.

It was now three o'clock in the morning—and she had sixty-four miles to ride! But this distance she was confident of being able to achieve within a very few hours, although it formed no part of her plan to imitate Dick Turpin in the astounding feat of accomplishing the journey with the same horse.

Having breathed her gallant courser for a few minutes on Blackheath, Lady Bess gave it the rein; and away, away it flew with an astonishing velocity.

"Fifteen miles from this point to Gravesend—or rather sixteen hence to the *Dancing Bear*—and I must do the distance in an hour!"

Thus she spoke aloud, her flute-like voice sounding melodiously through the fresh air of morning. The twilight was glimmering in the east—very faintly as yet, but still it was appearing: and she thought to herself that she would yet ride many a mile ere the sun rose—aye, and many a long mile more too, ere it should be very high above the horizon. The exhilaration which she felt amounted almost to an intoxication. She was as happy as if not the slightest danger hung over her head,—happier indeed, for it was in consequence of that danger she was now pursuing an adventure so thoroughly congenial to her daring, dauntless, reckless character. Her horse needed not the touch of spur or whip: an occasional caress with the hand and the encouraging voice of its mistress impelled the animal to the development of all its powers of swiftness—and never did the lithe and graceful Arab courser dash with a more lightning speed over the arid desert than Lady Bess's gallant horse along the high road to Dover. The weather at that hour in the morning and in the genial month of June was

delicious, with just a sufficient freshness of breeze to cool down the perspiration of the flying animal, and to heighten into the richest glow the bloom upon its rider's cheeks. She felt a buoyancy of spirits and a lightness of heart such as she had never experienced before. Though always of a free, and jovial, and careless disposition, yet now her happiness was a delirium—a whirl of bliss—an ecstacy. The blood ran like lightning in her veins; and from time to time her merry laugh rang through the air like a peal of silver bells, as she thought of the glorious feat of outwitting the two keen and cunning lawyers.

Now the town of Dartford is reached: she somewhat relaxes the speed of her horse, so as not to excite suspicion, should any loiterer or early riser be about, by dashing through the street at too tremendous a pace. But scarcely are the limits of the sleeping town cleared, when away she flies again along the well-beaten road. Now she has a glimpse of the Thames as it winds its way past Greenhithe—then she loses sight of it again; but in a few minutes more she obtains a fuller view of the broad and ample flood as she passes over an eminence near Northfleet. Onward still, with an unrelaxing speed, the dark chesnut flies—Gravesend is reached—again she checks the noble animal in his career—but not a soul appears in the street, and in a few minutes more she dashes up to the front of the *Dancing Bear*. She looks at her watch—'tis four o'clock—and she is exultant!

At the same moment that she springs from her steed the stable door of the public-house is thrown open, and Israel Patch comes forth leading another horse ready caparisoned. If not quite so elegant in its appearance as the dark chesnut, the relay-courser is but little inferior, and gives promise of no mean capacity for the work that is to be done. Few and rapid are the words which pass between Lady Bess and Israel Patch; and the moment her own steed is conducted into the stable, she bids him bring her forth a draught of ale—a command which he loses no time to obey. The amazon drinks but a portion of the tankard's foaming contents: then springing upon the fresh steed, away she flies again.

"Twenty-nine miles hence to Boughton," she exclaims aloud; "and I must do the distance within a few minutes of two hours! Yes—it can be done—it *shall* be done!" she cries with enhancing exultation, as she is now well assured of the capabilities and powers of the steed which she at present bestrides.

The sun has risen—light has broken with gradual step upon the earth, and breathed the breath of life into the hitherto pulseless veins of slumber-locked creation. The orb of day breaks out in glory upon the world—nature is wakening from her trance—but all the night-dews remain upon her breast, like sparkling gems on the bosom of an Oriental sultana aroused by the break of morning from the voluptuous cushions whereon she has reposed.

The loveliness of the scene—the freshness of the morn—the gay caroling of the birds—the myraid tiny voices in which the insect world was speaking—all had the effect of elevating Lady Bess's spirits to the highest point. Onward speeds the horse—by heaven! she begins to think that its powers, its energies, its action are all equal to those of her own gallant dark chesnut! Now she reins him in for a moment to walk him through a road-side pond—and twice she leaped down to wash his mouth with a bunch of long grass damp with the pearly dew. He seems to recognise these attentions—to know that he is made much of—and also to be aware that he has a duty to perform in return. Yes—for a specific task is set—that good steed must be at Boughton ere the hand of his rider's watch marks the hour of six. On, on, then—there is not an instant to lose!—on, on! Ah! the goal is in view—there is the tall sign-post—and in a few moments more the panting steed halts in front of the *Red Dragon*. Again does Lady Bess look at her watch; bravo! it still wants ten minutes to six o'clock!

At the public-house which she has now reached a fresh horse is in readiness. The man Dean has not neglected the message delivered through the agency of the carrier-pigeon. A few rapid words are exchanged—another sip of ale taken—and away speeds Lady Bess on the last stage of her journey. Nineteen miles are before her—it will take an hour and a quarter to accomplish that distance; but she will enter Dover a few minutes after seven o'clock!

Away she speeds—four miles are soon dashed over—and then she reaches the outskirts of Canterbury. But as at this hour many persons are astir and she does not chose to court observation, she makes a slight circuit so as to avoid passing through the place altogether. She knows all that part of the country well—each lane, each turning; and in a few minutes does she emerge upon the high road again on the furthermost outskirts of Canterbury. The relay-steed which she obtained at the *Red Dragon* was equal to the former—equal too as near as might be to her own; and thus she gallops on like the wind. Without impediment—but in exultation, in almost frenzied joy—in a perfect delirium of delight—is mile after mile passed over;—and now at length the towering heights and gloomy fortalice of Dover Castle break upon her view.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" her voice rings out in swelling harmony to the breeze that already seems fresh with the salt taste derived from the sea.

Dover is reached: she looks at her watch again—it is ten minutes past seven! She has ridden from the northern outskirts of London in five hours and a half!

Immediately on her arrival at the *Admiral's Head*, Lady Bess was hurried up-stairs by Kate Marshall and her sisters to a bed-chamber; and there the three young women embraced her in the enthusiasm of admiration for the feat which she had performed. They then assisted to disapparel her of her male garments; and Lady Bess was by no means sorry to stretch her stiff and wearied limbs in the comfortable couch. Kate sat down by the bed-side, and explained to her the stratagem which her father had adopted the moment the carrier-bird brought the despatch upwards of four hours previously. One of her sisters hastened down stairs to procure breakfast for the intrepid traveller; while the other sister bustled about to put the masculine garments out of the way, and substitute for them a female garb which Kate's wardrobe furnished; and as the elder Miss Marshall was nearly as possible of the same height and figure as Lady Bess, there was no fear of the raiment proving unsuitable. The bottle of medicine which had been procured from Mr. Hood's assistant, was emptied, and then conspiciously

placed on the table near the bed, just as if its contents had been duly imbibed by her whose name appeared on the label.

Breakfast was speedily brought up; and Lady Bess did most ample justice to it. By the time she had finished her meal and the things were cleared away, it was eight o'clock; and in order to render the stratagem in respect to the surgeon as complete as possible, old Marshall stepped down the street to fetch him.

In a few minutes Mr. Hood was duly escorted by Mrs. Marshall into the pretended invalid's chamber. The surgeon was a middle-aged man, of rather a benevolent countenance, and of pleasing address. He had been long established in Dover and was much respected. If he had a fault, it was in a certain sneaking affection which he cherished for money; and therefore when he observed a well-filled purse lying upon the table close by his empty bottle, he could not help feeling pleased at having a patient evidently so well able to remunerate him for his services.

Lady Bess put on the most lugubrious look it was possible for her handsome and healthy countenance to assume; and if the doctor had only seen her playing so fine a part with the breakfast a quarter of an hour previous, he would assuredly have fancied that a lady possessed of such an appetite must be endowed with an iron constitution.

"Well, how are we this morning?" he asked, in his blandest tones, as he took Lady Bess's hand. "Pulse somewhat feverish—eh?"

Lady Bess thought that Mr. Hood's pulse would be very likely to beat quickly if he had ridden nearly eighty miles in five hours and a half: but though she experienced an almost irresistible inclination to burst out into the merriest laugh, she nevertheless so far controlled herself as to subdue that desire and modulate her voice into faint and languid tones, as she said, "I feel somewhat better now, doctor. But I was very, very ill in the night; and I feared that the fit was coming on just now again when the landlord went to fetch you."

"Ah! you must have another draught," said Mr. Hood. "No appetite, I suppose?"

"Not in the least," answered Lady Bess; and she thought it would be very odd if she had after the quantities of cold fowl, ham, and buttered toast she had partaken of within the past half-hour.

"Well, you must have a little gruel presently, with a piece of dry toast," said Mr. Hood.

"I am convinced I never should be able to take it," rejoined Lady Bess; and Kate Marshall turned away to the window in order to prevent herself from bursting out into a laugh in the doctor's face.

"Oh! you must take some sustenance," exclaimed Mr. Hood; "but of a light character, for you are still feverish. When did this indisposition commence?"

"The lady arrived here last evening about seven o'clock," Mrs. Marshall hastened to observe; "and she complained very soon afterwards—didn't she, Kate?"

"Yes, mother," was the response given by the eldest daughter.

"And then it was a little after three in the morning, I suppose, that you got so bad, ma'am?" said the doctor, addressing his patient; "for I learn from my assistant that it was about that time he was rung up."

"I really took no note of the hour," answered Lady Bess; "but I know that I had been suffering ever since I went to bed, before the fit seized upon me."

Mr. Hood remained a few minutes longer with his patient, asking her certain requisite questions—or we should rather say, certain questions which he considered requisite; and then he took his leave, promising to send another draught in the course of the forenoon, and desiring that he might be fetched if any change should take place in her condition.

When the doctor had fairly quitted the room, Lady Bess gave vent to her long pent-up mirth in peals of the most joyous laughter, wherein she was joined by Kate, who remained with her, Mrs. Marshall having left the room with the doctor to escort him down stairs.

"And how do you really feel?" inquired Kate, when the paroxysm of that convulsive merriment was over.

"I feel somewhat tired and stiff," responded Lady Bess, wiping away the tears which had rolled down her cheeks in the excess of her mirth: "but in all other respects I never was better, and certainly never happier. I am not one, my dear Kate, who after an extraordinary exhilaration of the spirits, receives a reaction leading into a proportionate despondency. I am pretty nearly always the same—sometimes more elated perhaps—but very seldom, if ever depressed. And now let me give you the history of that pleasant little adventure of mine which has compelled me to perform this feat."

The amazon thereupon recounted the incidents of the previous night, which are already known to the reader; and Kate laughed heartily at her friend's ludicrous description of the discomfiture which the two lawyers had experienced.

"Now I do not think they are positively vindictive," added Lady Bess; "but they are keen, sharp fellows, and have got it into their heads that, being lawyers, they must vindicate what is called the majesty of the law. So, it is highly probable that they will have instituted a hue and cry, or else a chase after me. Perhaps, even, they may make their appearance in Dover presently, in the idea that I shall endeavour to escape into France. Well, let them come: I most cordially hope they will—for it is better to have the thing examined into down here and have done with it, than have to wait till I return to London and then send for all you as witnesses. But what time is the first train down?"

"About eleven o'clock for the French mails," replied Kate.

"And it is now about half-past eight," said Lady Bess, referring to her watch which lay upon the table by the bedside. "Well, I can at least reckon upon two or three hours' good sleep."

"For which purpose I will therefore leave you," said Kate; but as she was about to open the door, she turned round, and with an arch smile upon her very good-looking countenance, said, "Shall I bring you up the gruel and toast at eleven?"

"Rather say a good luncheon, my dear friend," responded Lady Bess, with another merry laugh: and then as Kate Marshall closed the door, the

female highwayman turned round in her couch and composed herself off to sleep as calmly and tranquilly as if there were not even the remotest chance of being brought into collision with the authorities.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RESULT.

It was a little after mid-day when a short, elderly, bustling gentleman, accompanied by one of the Dover police-constables, entered the *Admiral's Head*, and proceeding straight up to the bar, inquired for the landlord. Old Marshall, who from the window of his parlour behind the bar immediately observed the visitors and of course guessed their errand, came forth with the coolest self-possession imaginable; and the police-officer at once said, "Mr. Marshall, we want to have a few minutes' conversation with you, if you please."

"To be sure: step in here," responded the landlord: and he accordingly admitted the bustling gentleman and the constable into the bar-parlour, where his wife and three daughters were seated. "But if it's private," the old man immediately exclaimed, "we can go into another room."

The constable looked at Mr. Marlow,—for he the gentleman was,—for him to give an answer; and the London solicitor at once said, "I presume these ladies are of your family?"

"My wife and daughters, sir," responded old Marshall.

"Then there can be no harm in my putting before them the questions which I have to ask. In a word, do you happen to have an individual —or to be more explicit, a woman in male attire, beneath your roof?"

"Well, I never!" whispered Miss Kate to her sisters: but purposely loud enough to be heard by the lawyer and constable.

"A what, sir?" exclaimed old Marshall, affecting the utmost astonishment.

"Well, then, I see that she is not here," observed Mr. Marlow, turning to the constable. "This is the eighth or ninth tavern we have visited, and everywhere the same negative answer. But I am determined to inquire at all the taverns in Dover, sooner than give up the chase."

"But why do you persist in thinking, sir," asked the constable, "that she *is* in Dover?"

"I have no reason beyond my belief that she will try and get over to France. However, we have set a watch for the railway trains——"

At this moment the doctor's boy made his appearance at the bar; and depositing a bottle on the counter shouted out, "Mrs. Chandos!" and then hurried away to deliver the remaining contents of his basket.

"Mrs. Chandos?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "By heaven, it is she!"

"Yes, sir," old Marshall promptly observed, "there is a lady of that name in the house."

"Enough, enough!" cried the excitable attorney. "Show us up to her room! Come along, constable—the bird's caught at last!"—and he was already rushing with frantic haste out of the bar when old Marshall's voice called him back.

"Where are you going, sir—and with this constable too? The lady is in bed and ill? But is there anything wrong about her? I'm sure I took her for a most respectable person——"

"Wrong about her? respectable person?" ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Why, she's a robber—a thief——"

"Good heavens, girls!" shrieked forth Mrs. Marshall; "do go and count the plate. A thief did you say, sir?"

"Yes—but a most daring thief, too—a highwayman—or rather a highway-woman!"

"Oh, dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Marshall, appearing to be dreadfully alarmed. "Only think of our having had such a desperate character in the house all night!"

"It's fortunate we have not every one had our throats cut," said Kate, making herself shudder from head to foot, while her two sisters likewise gave vent to their pretended feelings of terror and dismay.

"Oh! if she's all that!" said old Marshall, "the sooner she's out of the house the better. Go up, one of you girls, and show this gentleman and the constable which is her room. But I hope she will pay her bill, though—and her doctor's, too, for that matter."

"There must be some mistake," said Mr. Marlow, who for the last few moments had been looking quite bewildered. "One of you talked of her having slept here all night. Why, she can't have been in the house above an hour or two, even if she travelled post the whole way from London: for we know she didn't come by the railway—we have already made inquiries about her there."

"There *must* be some mistake then," said old Marshall; "for the Mrs. Chandos we are talking of, has been here ever since six or seven o'clock last evening."

"Then it's not the same," ejaculated Marlow. "How singular!—a coincidence of names! But what sort of a looking woman is she?" The Mrs. Chandos I mean must be about six-and-twenty—though when dressed as a man, she of course looks several years younger. Complexion, delicate olive—a rich colour on the cheeks —large black eyes—very bright black hair, beautifully curling—full lips, the least thing coarse—splendid teeth—stands about five feet ten, I should think—excellent figure, upright as a dart—and fine voice, strong for a woman but not harsh!"

"Well, I declare," exclaimed Kate, knowing that Lady Bess wanted to be arrested at Dover so as to get the affair terminated in that town, "this description exactly answers the lady up-stairs."

"The deuce it does!" quickly ejaculated Mr. Marlow. "Then I am on the right scent again. But she didn't come in male attire?"

"Oh! no, sir," responded Kate, with an indignant toss of the head; "or I am sure that she wouldn't have been received into this house. The constable there can tell you that the *Admiral's Head* is of the highest respectability."

"Yes, Miss—that I will warrant," remarked the officer, who had received many a gratuitous drink at the bar of the establishment.

"Well, well, I meant no offence, young lady" quickly rejoined Mr. Marlow. "But do let us endeavour to clear up one point—when did this lady arrive?"

No. 11.—THIRD SERIES.

"It was between six and seven last evening, sir," answered Kate; "as we have already told you."

"Yes," immediately observed old Marshall, opening an account-book: "here's the entries of what she has had. Tea—Supper—Bed—and Breakfast."

"Which last she didn't touch though," added Kate, "because she's so ill."

"So ill indeed," observed old Marshall, "that I was called up in the middle of the night to go to the doctor and get her a draught."

"What o'clock was that?" demanded Mr. Marlow, quickly.

"What o'clock?" responded the landlord, appearing to reflect: "why, I should think about three in the morning."

"Yes, it was just three," immediately interjected Kate; "because I had been sitting up with the poor lady!"

"Oh! then, decidedly it is *not* the Mrs. Chandos I mean," said Mr. Marlow, wonderfully perplexed and bewildered. "And yet that extraordinary likeness which appears to exist——But I say, is it possible that I could obtain a glimpse of this Mrs. Chandos of yours without giving her any offence, supposing that it is really not the same?"

"I will go up and see whether she is dressed," said Kate: then suddenly appearing to hesitate, she exclaimed with a frightened look, "But if it should be the highway-woman after all——"

"Then the sooner we get rid of her the better," replied old Marshall. "Come, this thing must be cleared up for our sakes."

"To be sure, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Marlow.

"At all events she can't eat you, Kate," said her father.

"Well, I will go," cried the young woman, as if mustering up all her courage.

She accordingly issued from the bar-parlour, and proceeding up-stairs, went at once to Lady Bess's room. This heroine had risen about half-an-hour previously, much refreshed by a sound and uninterrupted sleep. She had nearly finished her toilet, and was just putting on the gown which Kate had supplied her in addition to all other requisite articles of female raiment, when the young woman herself thus made her appearance.

"You needn't tell me what it is that has brought you," said Lady Bess, laughing; "for I see by your countenance that the crisis is at hand."

Miss Marshall forthwith explained everything that had just taken place below; but somewhat apprehensive as to the result, and entertaining a very sincere friendship for Lady Bess, she said to her, "Now, my dear Elizabeth, if you really are at all uncertain about the possible ending of this adventure, do for heaven's sake let me get you out of the house unperceived."

"My dear girl," exclaimed Lady Bess, taking Kate's hand and clasping it warmly, "do I look like a person who entertains any alarm on the subject? Quite the contrary! I am rejoiced that what I wanted to occur has so speedily taken place. And now tell me, how do your garments seem to fit me?"

"Perfectly well," replied Kate, altogether cheered and encouraged by the tone of confidence in which Lady Bess had spoken.

The amazonian lady surveyed herself in a full-length mirror when Kate had fastened her dress; and the reflection of the image which she beheld on the polished surface of that glass was one whereof she might well be proud. Lady Bess now appeared as a most splendid woman. Her commanding height was relieved by the fine developments of her form, the closely fitting dress setting off the rich feminine contours to the utmost advantage. It was true that so far as her features were concerned, they now appeared largely chiselled and therefore somewhat coarse: but it was impossible to gaze upon those splendid dark eyes—the richness of those moist and luscious lips—the teeth faultlessly even and without the faintest blemish—and the nose of perfect straightness, without being compelled to admit that if the sweetness of beauty were not there, yet that the countenance was one of a strikingly handsome appearance.

Inasmuch as to suit her male apparel Lady Bess had been accustomed to wear her hair somewhat short—that is to say, long for a man but short for a woman—she had now made the most of it by arranging it in bands; and in its extraordinary luxuriance it seemed that if let loose it would flow down in the richest redundancy upon her shoulders. Shining in its rich natural glossiness, that magnificent raven hair was parted above the high and open forehead which seemed capable of enthroning the noblest thoughts.

From her waist down to her feet the flowing skirt of her dress afforded indications of the sweeping length of those limbs which the drapery now concealed: but as she turned away from the mirror, a glimpse was allowed of the well-rounded ankles, and the admirably shaped feet with their arching insteps. Altogether she was a superb creature; and pity it was that she was what she was!

"Now, have you furnished me with a bonnet, shawl, gloves, parasol, and all those kind of things?" she inquired, with a merry laugh flowing in the flute-like tones of her melodious voice.

"Everything is here," responded Kate, pointing to a chair in the corner where the articles which Lady Bess mentioned had been deposited. "I have chosen the things from my own wardrobe that I thought would best suit your complexion, figure, and appearance. Do let me congratulate you upon your looks in that garb!"

"You like me better, then, as I am now than in the other dress?" said the amazonian lady.

"Yes: I think I do: and yet there is something so dashing and fine in your man's apparel. But you must not put on the bonnet and shawl now! Remember that you are an invalid—on gruel and dry toast," added Kate Marshall in a merry voice. "Seriously speaking, however, what are you going to do?"

"See Mr. Marlow, to be sure," at once responded Lady Bess. "Now show me to your best furnished private apartment, Kate; and I will lie down upon the sofa with as languishing an air of interesting indisposition as I can possibly assume. Then you can introduce Mr. Marlow."

"But upon what pretence?" inquired Kate: "for he scarcely believes now, I think, that *our* Mrs. Chandos is *his* Mrs. Chandos."

"Tell him that you have very candidly explained to me as much as you thought fit of all that has taken place down stairs; and that I at once, with equal candour, informed you who I am—named

Mrs. Chandos residing at the cottage near Tottenham in the neighbourhood of London. Then he is sure to take the business before the mayor; and that is just what I want."

"Come then, Elizabeth," said Kate Marshall; and she forthwith conducted the heroine to a well-furnished parlour on the same storey as the bed-chamber where this colloquy took place.

Having seen the heroine deposit herself with the air of an invalid upon the sofa, Kate sped down stairs and returned to the bar-parlour.

"Well," cried Mr. Marlow, with that nervous excitement which was habitual to him, "what have you done?"

"I very candidly informed Mrs. Chandos," returned Kate, "that a solicitor from London and a police-officer belonging to this town had come to inquire for a lady of the same name—and that the lady thus inquired for was represented to be a highway-woman."

"And what did she say?" demanded Mr. Marlow.

"She looked indignant at first, when she thought that allusion was made to herself," continued Kate: "but when I assured her that no one had positively charged her with being the highway-woman thus alluded to, she ceased to be angry. Then, of her own accord, she at once declared that so far as she herself was concerned she was a highly respectable lady, of independent means, and living on the outskirts of London somewhere near Tottenham, I think she said—or Edmonton."

"Then, by heaven! it must be the same, after all!" cried Mr. Marlow. "Tottenham and Edmonton join each other——But go on: what else took place?"

"The lady, with the utmost candour," rejoined Kate, "requests that you will walk up to her room and take the officer with you if you like."

"I shall most assuredly do so," exclaimed the solicitor. "Now, Miss Marshall, be pleased to lead the way."

Kate accordingly retraced her steps up-stairs, closely followed by Mr. Marlow and the constable. On reaching the parlour, Kate opened the door; and the very first glimpse which the keen-sighted attorney caught of Lady Bess, he cried, "It is the same—I know it is! Unless indeed she has a sister as like herself as one pea is like another! Pray, ma'am," he added, advancing towards Lady Bess, "have you a sister?"

"No—I have not, sir," she at once replied, raising herself up to a sitting posture on the sofa where she had previously been reclining.

Mr. Marlow surveyed her for nearly a minute with the most scrutinizing earnestness. He had seen her on many occasions riding about the neighbourhood of Edmonton and Tottenham in female attire; and he had likewise observed her very attentively indeed on the preceding night, during the few minutes he and his partner were in her own elegantly furnished parlour at the cottage. Now, therefore, when he examined her from head to foot with the keenest scrutiny—observed her superb dark eyes—her strongly-marked features, especially the rich fullness of the lips—when he noted, too, the figure, and calculated what must be the stature of this lady on whom he was now gazing, it was impossible he could come to any other conclusion than that he saw before him the female highwayman who had escaped from his clutches during the past night. Therefore, without pausing to reflect any longer upon the astounding evidence he had heard in the bar-parlour to disprove this identity, he suddenly exclaimed, "Well, I am decided! At all risks I give this woman into custody."

"Me, sir, into custody!" exclaimed Lady Bess, with an indignation that was admirably assumed: and her eyes flashed fire upon the attorney.

"Yes—you," he answered: then turning abruptly round towards the officer, he said, "Constable, do your duty."

"Ma'am, you must consider yourself in custody," said the police official to Lady Bess.

"Oh, very well!" she exclaimed. "Who ever this gentleman is—if a gentleman he be—he shall smart for it. There is such a thing as an action for damages in this country."

"We will not bandy words here," said Mr. Marlow. "I suppose the case can be heard at once before the Mayor. You can bring your prisoner along with you; and I will inquire my way to the Town-hall. We will go separately."

With these words Mr. Marlow put on his hat and whisked out of the room.

"Miss Marshall," said Lady Bess, addressing Kate in the presence of the constable as if speaking to a stranger and an inferior, "fetch me my bonnet and shawl; for I can assure you that I am in as great a hurry to have this matter investigated as the individual who has just quitted the room can possibly be."

Kate accordingly repaired to fetch the things which Lady Bess required; and when our heroine had put on the pretty bonnet, and the new French shawl (never before worn) with which Kate likewise supplied her, she looked so superbly handsome that the police-officer could not help gazing upon her with admiration.

"As this is an affair," observed Kate, pretending to be very serious, "which, as my father says, to some little extent involves the respectability of his establishment, he and my mother, myself and sisters, are all going to the Town-hall."

"Very well, then—you can do as you like," exclaimed Lady Bess, affecting to be somewhat offended by the remark: "but I will proceed thither at once with the officer. Of course," she said, addressing herself to the constable, "you do not wish to subject me to any ignominious treatment: for I can assure you that this is all a mistake, and will speedily be cleared up."

The policeman naturally thought from all he had heard in the bar that it really was a mistake; and he had been much surprised at Mr. Marlow determining to give the lady into charge. Besides, when he looked at her he could not possibly fancy for a moment that a female with a certain elegant and fashionable air of distinction, could be nothing more than a robber. He therefore assured the lady that he did not wish to subject her to the slightest inconvenience, and that if she would walk in front of him, he would keep at such a distance from her as to prevent the people in the streets from observing that she was in his custody. Therefore, ere quitting the tavern, he gave her a few directions which turnings to take so as to reach the Town-hall. These little arrangements being made, Lady

Bess issued forth, the constable keeping in her track, but at an interval of a dozen or fifteen yards.

The Town-hall was reached; and Mr. Marlow, who had got there first, stopped the Mayor from quitting the magisterial seat, as he was about to do, the morning's business being over. So quietly had the whole thing been managed that nothing of what was going on had got wind through the town; and there were consequently but very few loiterers in the court when Lady Bess was introduced to the presence of the magistrate. Almost immediately after her arrival, old Marshall and his family, accompanied by Mr. Hood and his assistant, made their appearance: for the tavern-keeper had called for the medical men on the way to the Town-hall, telling them what had occurred, and intimating that from all which had transpired in his own bar-parlour he thought their evidence would be wanting. Of course Mr. Hood and the assistant were very much surprised to hear of their patient being in custody on such a serious charge; and they felt assured it must be some extraordinary mistake.

Lady Bess was compelled to enter the dock, the accusation being one of felony against her. But she sat down there with an aspect of calm dignity and of placid confidence, in which however there was not the slightest tinge of bravado nor unseemly hardihood. The Marshalls and the medical men placed themselves on a bench reserved for witnesses; while Mr. Marlow entered the witness-box.

The proceedings then commenced by the prosecutor being sworn. He stated that his name was Sidney Marlow—that he was a solicitor carrying on business in Parliament Street, Westminster—and that his private abode was at Edmonton, also in the county of Middlesex. He then proceeded to describe the circumstances of the attempted robbery, just as they are already known to the reader—not omitting the details of Lady Bess's escape from the cottage: that is to say, so far as he was acquainted with them.

At this stage of the proceedings the Mayor, addressing Lady Bess, said, "The present is so very serious a charge that perhaps you would like to have the case remanded in order that you may procure the assistance of counsel?"—and as he spoke he could not help gazing upon the prisoner in astonishment blended with compassionate interest; for he naturally felt both surprised and grieved that a female of such a prepossessing appearance should have placed herself in what seemed to be a most threatening dilemma.

"I thank your worship for this kind suggestion on your part," answered Lady Bess; "but I think that after your worship has heard a statement which the landlord of the *Admiral's Head* can make, and which all his family can corroborate, you will perceive that I shall have no need for any legal advice."

"Then let Mr. Marshall stand forward," said the Mayor.

The landlord of the *Admiral's Head*, with the blunt honest look that was characteristic of him, and which was calculated to deceive the Evil One himself, stood up and was sworn.

"Now, Mr. Marshall," said Lady Bess, "will you have the kindness to tell his worship at what hour I arrived at your establishment?"

"It was between six and seven o'clock last evening," responded Marshall, with imperturbable gravity.

The Mayor was evidently struck with astonishment; and turning towards Mr. Marlow, he said, "At what hour of the past night was it that your carriage was stopped in the manner you have described?"

"It must have been, as near as I can guess, close upon one o'clock," replied the solicitor.

"Then, do you not clearly see," asked the Mayor, "that a perfect *alibi* is proven?"

"I confess, your worship, that I am bewildered," responded Mr. Marlow. "But I should like this young lady"—pointing to Kate—"to be sworn."

"To be sure," said the Mayor. "Miss Marshall, stand forward."

Kate, with as much resoluteness and self-possession as her father had just shown, stepped into the witness-box and unhesitatingly took the oath.

"Now, Miss Marshall," said Mr. Marlow, "what communication did the prisoner make to you relative to her place of abode?"

"She told me, sir," was the response, "that she lived at a cottage somewhere near Tottenham and Edmonton."

"And your worship will observe," exclaimed Mr. Marlow, "that it was at a cottage near Edmonton and Tottenham whence the prisoner, as I maintain, escaped from me in the manner I have described. I submit that the identity is proven."

"At what o'clock, Mr. Marlow," asked Lady Bess, "do you allege that I escaped from you? You have stated that the attack upon your carriage was made about a quarter to one: will you be kind enough to mention how long afterwards it was that the escape took place?"

"About an hour afterwards," responded Marlow: "it was getting on for two."

"At which hour, your worship," said Lady Bess, "I was lying in bed very ill at the tavern kept by Mr. Marshall in Dover. I therefore leave it to your worship to decide whether I could have been at the cottage near London and at the hotel in Dover at one and the same time."

"I think, your worship," said Mr. Hood's assistant, now stepping forward, "that I can give some important evidence in the matter: for though I never saw the prisoner at the bar before in my life, yet I would not for the world remain silent when the character and liberty of a fellow-creature are at stake."

The assistant was accordingly sworn; and he deposed that shortly after three o'clock in the morning, he had been rung up by Mr. Marshall, to furnish a composing draught for a lady who was lying ill at the *Admiral's Head*—that he was told the lady's name was Mrs. Chandos—and that he had written that name on the label accordingly.

Mr. Hood now also requested to be sworn: and this being done, he deposed that at eight o'clock in the morning he had visited Mrs. Chandos, the prisoner at the bar, at the hotel—that he had seen her there—and was confident she was the same lady who now stood in the dock.

"This is the most extraordinary case," said the Mayor, "that ever came before me. Mr. Marshall, you are quite positive that the prisoner arrived at your house last evening between six and seven o'clock?"

"I am as certain, your worship, as that I am now addressing you," was the reply. "My wife and daughters can all prove it. And here," he added, producing a day-book, "are the entries of what the lady had at the hotel. Your worship will perceive that there are entries of tea and supper under yesterday's date. I make up this book every night before I go to bed."

The book was handed up to the Mayor, who examined the *items;* and then turning to Mr. Marlow, he said, "Really, sir, I think you ought to be satisfied that this is a case of mistaken identity. Has the lady a sister at all resembling her?"

"That, your worship," responded the attorney, "was the very question I put to her in the presence of the constable: and she emphatically replied in the negative. Now observe, your worship—the woman who made the attempted robbery on me and my partner, told me her name was Mrs. Chandos; and the prisoner at the bar says she is Mrs. Chandos. Again, the woman who attempted the robbery took me to a cottage which has been described; and the woman at the bar admits that she lives at that cottage. Then again, I have often seen the woman who attempted to rob me riding about Edmonton; I also scrutinized her well between one and two o'clock this morning when she had on her male attire: and I am convinced that the woman at the bar is the same that I have seen riding about Edmonton and whom I beheld in male attire during the past night. Therefore I maintain, that so far as I am concerned, I have proved the identity. I confess that I am staggered and even bewildered by the counter-evidence that has been given; and without for a single instant impeaching the veracity of the Marshalls, of Mr. Hood, or of his assistant, I can only say that if the woman at the bar is not the female highwayman who attempted to rob me and my partner, then from this time forth I shall not be able to put faith in the evidence of my own senses. Under all the circumstances, I think your worship will admit that this is a case which ought to be sent before a superior tribunal; and therefore I ask your worship to direct that the prisoner at the bar be sent up to London in charge of some officer of your court, with a view to a farther investigation before the magistrate of the district in which the felony was committed. And before I conclude I will observe that a great responsibility rests upon the shoulders of your worship at the present moment: because if your worship refuses my demand, the proceedings must drop altogether here, as I should feel too disgusted and have too little confidence in the force of truth—and I may also say in the evidences of my own senses—to have the case re-opened or the investigation renewed elsewhere. Therefore, as the fairest course which can be adopted, and that there may be no chance of a guilty person escaping punishment in consequence of testimony of a somewhat inexplicable nature, I repeat my demand that the prisoner be sent up to London."

"I have little trouble," said the Mayor, after a few minutes' consultation with his clerk, "in giving my judgment in this matter. There are two views that may be taken of the case. Firstly, it is shown by the evidence of a most respectable hotel-keeper of this town that the prisoner at the bar arrived at his house by seven o'clock last evening; and granting that fact to be established, it is totally impossible the prisoner could have committed the assault upon the prosecutor in the middle of the night. Secondly, we have the evidence of a gentleman of unquestionable veracity—Mr. Hood—that he saw the prisoner at the bar at the hotel this morning at eight o'clock. Now, even setting aside Mr. Marshall's evidence altogether, can we suppose that the prisoner, if she had escaped from the cottage near London at a little before two in the morning, could have been at Dover at eight? There was no railway-train by which she could arrive. Had she travelled post the whole distance, which I compute to be from Edmonton to Dover nearly eighty miles, she could not have done it in the time. As for her performing such a journey on horseback in so short a period, the idea is out of the question. Such a feat could only be accomplished by frequent relays, ordered and arranged beforehand: for to obtain several consecutive changes of horses at such hours, when road-side inns are all shut up and their inmates asleep, would occasion a waste of time far beyond what can enter into the present computation. In addition, however, to the evidence of Mr. Marshall, proving that the lady was at his hotel at seven o'clock last evening—and to that of Mr. Hood, proving that she was there at eight this morning—we have the circumstantial evidence spoken to by the assistant, proving that she was there soon after three this morning. Therefore, taking all these facts into consideration, I can only come to one conclusion: namely, that it is a case of mistaken identity under very extraordinary circumstances; and I have no alternative but to declare the *alibi* most satisfactorily established, and to discharge the prisoner from custody."

Mr. Marlow slapped his hand violently down upon the ledge of the witness-box, and exclaimed, "Well, sir, I can scarcely blame you for the decision to which you have come, considering all that has transpired: and here therefore the matter drops. But in future I shall believe in nothing I hear, see, or touch. If anybody tells me at noonday that the sun is shining, I shall answer that it may possibly be so, but it is not certain."

Having thus spoken with excited volubility, Mr. Marlow bowed to the Mayor and hurried out of the court.

Lady Bess then returned to the *Admiral's Head* in company with her friends; and immediately on their arrival at the tavern, Mr. Hood earnestly counselled her to take her composing draught and go to bed, or the excitement which she had undergone would be very likely to bring back her hysterical fits. The amazonian lady promised to follow this advice: but so soon as the surgeon and his assistant had taken their leave, she sat down to an excellent luncheon with the Marshalls; and heartily did they all laugh at the discomfiture of the bustling Mr. Marlow.

Before we conclude this chapter, we must give a few requisite explanations. The scrap of paper, written by Lady Bess, and sent by the carrier-pigeon, contained the following lines:—

Stations—horses.
Dover—Do something to prove I was at your house this night.
Twenty minutes to two.

The first line was a command merely referring to

the two stations of Gravesend and Boughton Hill: the second, by having the word *Dover* prefixed, showed that this portion of the message was intended for the Marshalls: the third indicated the exact time when the bird was despatched. At Gravesend Rebecca Patch made a cross on the billet, to show that the bird had halted at one station: at Boughton Hill Joe Dean did the same thing, as an indication that the second station had been touched at. If, for instance, the bird had reached Boughton Hill without the proof that it had stopped at Gravesend, Joe Dean would have still let it proceed on to Dover: but would have at once despatched a carrier dove of his own to Gravesend to give the order for the relay-horse that was needed: and if the bird had reached Dover without the proofs (indicated by the two marks on the scrap of paper) of having stopped at the intermediate stations, then Kate Marshall would have sent the bird back with another note conveying the requisite orders for the relays.

With regard to the secret of the writing, the clue to the reading thereof depended, as a matter of course, upon a preconcerted arrangement and understanding known to all the parties concerned: and the clue to the mystery lay in the possession of the key to a certain transposition of the alphabet. Each day in the year 1844 had its particular initial letter thus definitively settled; and we have seen that on the present occasion the letter L served that purpose. This letter, then, became for the occasion, the *first* in the alphabet. Our meaning can be better conveyed by placing in juxta-position the proper alphabet and the alphabet according to which Lady Bess's note was written:—

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v
l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z a b c d e f g
w x y z
h i j k

Thus *l* served for *a*, *m* for *b*, *n* for *c*—and so on. We must likewise observe that instead of the capital letter I, when expressing the first person, a star (*) was used in the hieroglyphic calligraphy.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

THE lounger through the Opera Colonnades in the Haymarket and Pall Mall can scarcely form a conception of the vast magnitude of the establishment by which he is passing: nor when the house is crowded of an evening, do those present—unless previously initiated—entertain the slightest idea of the multiplicity of the appliances and the complication of the machinery requisite to produce all the scenic effects which they behold upon the stage.

With regard to the size of the establishment, it is enormous, and in addition to the performers, furnishes employment for an almost countless host of persons who are never seen within the sphere of that blaze of light which fills the place when open to the public. The approaches to the vast amphitheatre—the corridors and staircases—the crush-rooms, where the visitors wait for their carriages when the performance is over—the refreshment-saloon—the enormous theatre itself, capable of containing three thousand persons—and the stage with its ample width and still greater depth—all these compartments of the premises, which are familiar to the visitor, fill up an enormous space. But in addition to those parts of the building which are thus well known, there are others which help to swell the magnitude of the edifice. For example, there are the private apartments in which the lessee and other authorities of the place may live entirely if they choose: there are numerous offices where clerks conduct the business-matters of the establishment in as regular and laborious a manner as in any great mercantile firm of the City; and in the precincts of the stage there are the numerous dressing-rooms for the performers, whether belonging to the opera or ballet. The leading characters of either department enjoy the privilege of separate dressing-rooms: but the minor performers dress three or four in a chamber—a due regard to the distinction of the sexes being of course maintained. There is an immense concert-room belonging to the building, and which in itself is larger than many of the minor theatres. Then there is the scene-painters' room—a place of considerable extent and of great height, as may be imagined from the extent of canvass that has to be spread out for the purpose of designing and colouring. There is the room where the theatrical properties are kept, comprising all the costumes and the various articles which have to be introduced on the stage to suit particular performances. Moreover, immense space is required for the mechanism of which we shall almost immediately have to speak; and thus from this mere fleeting and imperfect glance at the principal departments and divisions of the establishment, some idea may be formed of its magnitude.

But at night, when the vast amphitheatre is one blaze of light and crowded with spectators from pit to roof, how few who are then present can form an idea of the mechanical power that is brought to bear upon all those shifting scenes which produce such splendid effects upon the stage. Perhaps it is a beautiful landscape which is thus represented—with trees, and fields, and water, and houses, and with the clouds above: but all the various portions of painted canvass that enter into the formation of that scenery are moved and put into their place by means of countless ropes and numbers of wheels, levers, and windlasses, so that to the eye of the visitor who is allowed to peep behind those scenes, it appears as if he were on board an immense ship and involved amidst the complications of its rigging. What hosts of carpenters and scene-shifters are likewise employed in the management and execution of all those arrangements which are thus unseen, and the extent of which is little suspected by the brilliant company sitting in front of the foot-lights! Underneath the stage it is apparently one confused and jumbled mass of mechanism, beams, posts, wheels, levers, and all imaginable contrivances for trap-doors, drops, and the numerous other artifices, devices, and ingenious arrangements which often produce such startling effects to the eyes of the audience.

From those dark profundities beneath the stage, high up to the very summit of the building—far above what appears to the spectators to be the top of the stage—a circular iron staircase winds its way, only just wide enough for one individual to thread it at a time; and during the performance constant communications are kept up between the

persons above and the persons below. Then, when scenes are to be shifted, all is haste and bustle—yet no confusion. Every one has his allotted task—every one knows what he has to do. But still the brilliant ladies lounging in their boxes, and the fashionable elegants whispering soft nonsense in their ears during the brief intervals of the scenes or the longer ones between the acts, little imagine the amount of activity which is prevailing behind the curtain, from the depths under the stage to the heights to which the iron staircase leads, in order that the next scene on which that curtain shall rise may be presented with an accuracy so as to produce the most perfect effect.

Such is the Opera—a little world in itself, and the management of which involves an expense so enormous that it is no wonder lessees require high prices and well-filled houses in order to maintain it. And when we pause to reflect upon the colossal salaries that are exacted by the Stars of the Song or the Dance—when we count the numbers of musicians in the orchestra and the hosts of minor characters who appear upon the stage,—remembering that all must be paid certain salaries, be they lesser or greater,—we cannot fail to be struck by the enormity of the whole outlay required, and the commensurate risk that has to be run on the part of the speculative individual who undertakes the management of the Opera.

There is no apartment at this establishment bearing the name of the *Green Room*, as at the great national theatres. Certain noblemen and aristocratic fashionables have the privilege of passing behind the scenes; and in the precincts thereof they lounge and loiter about on the nights of performance, chatting with the ballet-girls, and dispensing their platitudes, their impertinences, or their flippancies to those of the female *artistes* who come in their way. But few of the opera-dancers, when beheld close, display even the shadow of the charms which they appear to possess when viewed from a distance. They are for the most part exceedingly thin: for it must be remembered that they invariably practise for several hours each day. The ballet-master is almost constantly in attendance; and if a visitor, escorted by some official of the establishment, peeps into the place any time between eleven in the forenoon and five in the evening, he will see a bevy of those girls dancing, pirouetting, bounding, and practising other saltatory exploits upon the stage, to the notes of a violin. This constant exercise therefore keeps the dancers thin, and renders many of them positively emaciated. Their's is the hardest life—their's the most wearying toil of any amongst the theatrical contingents. Then, too, though the Stars of the Ballet are handsomely remunerated, the ordinary dancers are but indifferently paid—the lowest in rank wretchedly enough! When the performance is over, these ill-paid creatures may be seen issuing forth from the hot and feverish atmosphere of the theatre, having just thrown off their gauzy raiment and huddled on their own clothing, too often poor and scant even to wretchedness; and thus from that torrid region they emerge into the chill of the night air, perhaps to face a deluging rain, or at some seasons a nipping frost. Their health suffers—their constitutions are undermined—and thus with the constant wear and tear of practice, and these liabilities to sudden variations of atmosphere, with their accompanying rheums and coughs, whatever personal beauty the ballet-girl may have originally possessed soon wanes, fades, and disappears. Some of them too, with sorrow be it said, lead a course of life which is of a nature to aggravate all the above-mentioned evils; and thus, when viewed close, they are very different from what they appear to be when seen from the house, bounding amidst a blaze of light upon the elastic boards of the stage. That bloom which appears to rest so naturally upon their cheeks as they are thus viewed from a distance, looks but a mere daub when beheld close—a thick coat of rouge; yet not always so thick as to prevent the haggard traits of the countenance from appearing through!

But we will not extend this picture to a length intruding upon the current of our tale. Having ere now stated that there is no Green Room at the Opera House in the Haymarket, we may observe that at the time of which we are writing the Concert Room, above mentioned, sometimes served as a lounge for the performers, and likewise for those privileged aristocrats and fashionables who penetrated behind the scenes.

One evening, a week after the incidents related in the preceding chapters, the Concert Room was more than usually crowded by such visitors. The opera performed that night was *I Puritani*; and during an interval between the Acts, Grisi, Lablache, and other eminent *artistes* engaged at the establishment, were gathered in a group conversing together in that Concert Room. Dispersed about, were the other performers in the Opera, and likewise the dancers in attendance upon the ballet. Although we have stated that as a general rule the ballet-girls will not bear a very close inspection—or at least that such near view is likely to produce some feeling of disappointment—yet there are of course exceptions to this rule: and a few beautiful creatures may be seen amongst them. Nor was it otherwise on the night to which we are specially referring; and those who were best-looking, as a matter of course, engrossed the principal share of attention on the part of the privileged loungers from outside. Rest assured, reader, that Angela Vivaldi was not present in the Concert Room. Though engaged to dance that evening, she remained in her own dressing-chamber until the appointed hour came; and then all intruders from before the curtain were compelled to retire. Such was her positive stipulation; and the rule was as rigorously observed as it could possibly be.

But Mademoiselle D'Alembert was very far from being so particular; and she was conspicuous amongst the Stars of the Dance congregated there. Apparelled in a Spanish dress, her fine figure was set off by that costume to the utmost advantage: so that the somewhat luxurious fullness of her shape was well displayed. She was not one who grew thin, much less emaciated, by her avocations: for being a thorough proficient in the dance she practised but little; and having a carriage to convey her to or from the scene of her Terpsichorean displays, and good clothes to muffle herself up in, she ran no chance of impairing her health through colds and coughs. Having a table, too, well supplied with every luxury, and being addicted to gormandizing, she maintained herself in a comfortable condition of

plumpness; though at the same time the most punctilious critic of female beauty would not have pronounced her too stout. She possessed magnificent dark dair—a pair of fine bright eyes, with nobly arching brows—and a beautiful set of teeth. Thus, altogether, Emily Archer—or Emile D'Alembert, which was her theatrical pseudonym—was a very handsome and attractive young woman.

At the moment when we thus particularly notice her amidst the throng in the Concert Room on the night in question, she was looking somewhat angry; inasmuch as young Lord Saxondale, who had promised to see her there that evening, had not as yet made his appearance. Several other gay gallants had accosted Miss Archer: but she gave them no encouragement to continue discoursing with her. The fact was, she was mightily pleased with her new conquest—knowing him to be the heir to immense estates on attaining his majority; and therefore she was too anxious to retain him in the silken chains of her fascination to risk losing him by a flirtation with other aspirants. Thus, if Miss Archer remained faithful to Lord Saxondale—and meant to do so, as long as it suited her convenience—it was through no love of him, but because her self-interest was gratified.

Suddenly her countenance brightened up, as she beheld the young nobleman enter the Concert Room; and nodding familiarly to three or four fashionable acquaintances whom he recognised, he passed amidst the throng and speedily joined Miss Emily Archer.

"How late you are to-night!" she said, affecting to pout her lips as she gave him her hand. "I thought you were not coming."

"My dear girl," responded Saxondale, "I was dining with my friend Lord Harold Staunton and a number of other men, and after dinner we had cards—so that really the time slipped away without my noticing it. But when I did see how late it was, I hurried off at once—and here I am. Now pray be so kind as to look as pleasant as you can."

"I will, since you have made an apology," answered Emily, who could judge pretty well from his manner that he had found the means of complying with a certain request she had made in the morning.

"There now! you look quite radiant," said the infatuated Edmund.

"But mind," she immediately rejoined, in a low whisper and with an arch smile, "that you do not fall in love with Angela Vivaldi again to-night; for you were desperately enamoured of her before you knew me. Indeed, you told me so."

"My dear Emily, it only required to know you in order to put the Signora Vivaldi altogether out of my head. Besides," added Saxondale, in a very low and mysterious whisper, "my friend Lord Harold Staunton——you know him?"

"Yes—I think I do," replied Miss Emily, appearing to reflect for a few moments: though, in good truth, it was very far from necessary—for she was full well acquainted with that nobleman, as of course he was with her. "Well, what about him?"

"Oh! he intends to pay his court to Angela."

"She is a prude—a veritable prude," observed Emily Archer: "but the stillest water is sometimes that which runs the deepest. And now tell me, my dear Edmund, have you thought of the little commission I gave you this morning, when you so kindly insisted upon doing something as a proof of your affection?"

"I have it here," he responded, significantly tapping his waistcoat-pocket. "Ah! I dare say you thought I had gone and lost it all at cards to-night: but you see you are mistaken."

"Then I suppose you called upon old Musters, as I told you?" observed Emily.

"Yes—to be sure: or else how could I have obtained the money? As for getting such a sum in addition to my allowance from old Lord Petersfield or those scurvy fellows Marlow and Malton, it was out of the question—particularly as that blessed mother of mine has been making mischief between me and my guardians. Would you believe it? they want me to go abroad as Unpaid Attaché to an Embassy; or else to go and bury myself down in that dreadful old castle in Lincolnshire."

"But you will not, though?" said Miss Archer, somewhat alarmed lest the young nobleman should be suddenly removed from beyond the sphere of her influence.

"Don't be afraid, my dear Emily," responded Saxondale: "I am not quite such a fool. Besides, since you have given me this introduction to the old money-lender, and he is so excessingly complaisant, I shall feel myself perfectly independent of my guardians and my mother. I got a couple of thousands from old Musters this morning; and here is the thousand," he added again tapping his waistcoat-pocket, "that you require. But shall I give it to you now?"

"No—you are coming home with me presently, I hope," answered Miss Emily, with her most bewitching smile. "I ordered supper to be in readiness, and champagne to be put in ice. Besides, I have got my new carriage——"

"Ah! is it come home?" asked Saxondale. "The coach-builder promised me it should be at Evergreen Villa by noon to-day."

"And he kept his word, my dear Edmund."

"And the two cream-coloured horses, with their splendid new harness?"

"They also were sent down this morning. Oh! I am so glad to have got rid of that sober-looking brougham, which was all that Mr. Walter would allow me. And by the bye," added Emily, "the coachman has got his new livery; so that the equipage altogether is quite charming. And now that I think of it, my dear Edmund, I have to thank you for the case of champagne which came down to the villa last night, and the new service of plate from the silversmith's in Bond Street."

We will not however prolong our details of this conversation. Enough has been already recorded to show that the shrewd and cunning ballet-dancer had succeeded in enmeshing the foolish young aristocratic pigeon in her toils, and that she intended to pluck him most unmercifully so long as this infatuation on his part should continue.

But turn we now to another part of that Concert Room; and there, in the remotest corner—retiring bashfully from the gaze which the lounging gallants insolently flung upon her as they passed—was a young creature of about sixteen, and whose beauty was rather of the pensive and interesting character than of the striking or dazzling description. Indeed, at first sight, there was nothing particularly

attractive about this young ballet-dancer: it was only when at a second look the observer noticed her more attentively, the impression gradually forced itself upon his mind that he beheld a very pretty and interesting creature. For her's was a beauty the sense of which stole imperceptibly upon one,—a beauty half the charm of which lay in its own retiring modesty. Yet nothing could be sweeter or purer than the look which beamed forth from those mild blue eyes, when she raised them, and before they were bashfully veiled again by their thick dark fringes:—nothing could be more softly melancholy or touchingly plaintive than the expression which grew upon that young girl's countenance, when all her thoughts, being withdrawn from the gay and busy scene around her, were concentrated on some source of affliction that lay deep in her soul. Her figure was slight and delicate, but beautifully symmetrical; and in her very shrinking from the rude and insolent looks that were flung upon her by the privileged loungers as they passed her by, there was an unstudied elegance and a natural grace which made her seem at those moments sweetly captivating in spite of herself.

This young girl was named Henrietta Leyden. She had been a ballet-dancer only during the present season; and her salary was a mere pittance—eight shillings a-week! But wherefore did she thus stand apart from the rest? Why did she shrink from the libertine looks that were fixed upon her? Because that young girl was still virtuous—still uncontaminated, even in the atmosphere of contamination. Yet, heaven knows she was not virtuous for want of temptation—but because she was superior to it. She had been well brought up: her family had seen better days: but misfortunes had suddenly entered their house, ravaging it like an army; for death had taken away her father at a moment when his affairs required the utmost attention to rescue them from ruin—and thus that ruin had come. As

an only resource wherewith to earn bread for her mother and a little brother, poor Henrietta had been forced to turn her accomplishment in dancing to the best possible account; and thus was it that she became one of the juniors in the ballet-corps.

Those fashionable loungers who gazed upon her with libertine looks, but who did not stop to speak to her now, had nearly all on former occasions whispered words of temptation in her ear, and had been repulsed. They therefore regarded her as a silly little prude, not good-looking enough to be worth any particular trouble: for it is not the retiring and modest beauty which steals into the souls of such men—it is the dazzling brilliancy or bold effrontery of charms which thrust themselves forward to be admired and courted, that exercise the greatest influence on the passions—for we will not say the *hearts*—of fashionable rakes and aristocratic libertines.

But presently an old man, at least four or five years past sixty,—yet dressed in the very height of fashion, and made up with all the artifices of the toilet so as to give as youthful an appearance as possible to his lean and shrivelled form—accosted Henrietta Leyden. He wore a wig as punctiliously curled as any that may be seen in a hairdresser's shop in the Burlington Arcade: the set of false teeth fixed in his mouth, had cost five hundred guineas: his eye-brows were stained with a black dye; and he affected to walk with a jaunty and debonnair gait, just as if all the fires of youth were still animating his frame and the vigour of health giving elasticity to his limbs. But this old man was one of the richest nobles of the day; and it would be difficult throughout the ranks of a profligate aristocracy, to discover one *more* profligate than Lord Everton.

"How is it, pretty Miss Leyden," said the old nobleman, smiling as blandly and affably as he could through the agency of his false teeth, "that you are standing thus apart? Every young lady has her friend, or admirer, or gallant, to converse with save yourself."

"My lord," replied Henrietta, "I do not seek such companionship as that to which your lordship has alluded:"—and the blood mantled upon the girl's cheeks so as even to be visible through the rouge that was upon them; for this was not the first time she had been subjected to the persecutions of Lord Everton.

"Come, my dear, you must not be so short and abrupt in your answers to me. I seek to be your friend. Why can't you hold up that pretty face of your's, and let me see you smile?"

"Smile!" ejaculated the girl, with an accent of bitterness: then as if vexed at having allowed herself to betray for even an instant the feeling that was dominant in her heart, she turned abruptly away.

"Stop one moment, Miss Leyden! I wish to speak to you," said the old lord. "It is serious—very serious indeed."

Henrietta, surprised at these words, did turn back: and now her deep blue eyes were fixed with a sort of curiosity upon Lord Everton's countenance.

"I wish I could see you happy," he said, affecting a deep sympathy for the young creature. "Look around you—what gaiety is upon every countenance! Observe Emily Archer, for instance—or Mademoiselle D'Alembert, as she chooses to call herself—how she and young Saxondale are laughing together! I am told that she is now under his protection, and it is natural she should be happy."

Henrietta Leyden was again turning away in mingled disappointment and disgust at the words which Lord Everton thus addressed to her, when he desired her to stop once more; and she, timid and bashful as she was, and fearful of drawing attention to herself by creating "a scene," shrank back into the corner where she had previously been standing: but at the same time she murmured in a supplicating voice, "My lord, I beseech you to leave me!"

The old nobleman beheld not that look of earnest entreaty which, as she spoke, she raised to his countenance: he saw only the beautiful blue eyes of the young ballet-girl—and thence his glances wandered to the pearly teeth that were visible between the virginal freshness of the lips, and to the white shoulders and neck which the scant gauzy drapery left bare.

"You know," he said, "that I am very rich, and I can be as liberal as I am wealthy. I told you that I had something very serious to impart—and it is so. The other night you thought, perhaps, I was speaking mere unmeaning phrases, and addressing you in idle flatteries; and therefore you turned away just as you were turning away a minute ago. But I am serious in offering you a mansion—splendid equipages—gold beyond all counting! I will surround you with luxuries—you shall quit the stage, and become a lady—nay, more, I will even settle upon you an annuity, so that at my death you will continue well off. All this I will do for you, Henrietta Leyden; and I came hither this night for the purpose of making you these proposals."

The young girl actually shivered from head to foot as she felt herself gradually yielding to the influence of these temptations. Wealth was suddenly placed within her reach: the dismal word *poverty* need never ring in her ears again, nor the spectral shade of want rise in its ghastly leanness and lankness before her affrighted view. She thought of the wretched garret from which she had come forth a few hours back to the brilliant scene of the Opera, and to which she must return when her part was played amidst the blaze of light upon the stage—that garret where she had left her revered and idolized mother stretched upon the bed of sickness, destitute of every comfort, wanting even many of the bare necessaries of life, and where also her poor little brother whom she loved so fondly and who loved her so affectionately in return, was clothed in rags and had naught save dry bread to eat! Of all this she thought—and it was no wonder if the young girl suddenly found herself sorely tempted. Oh! if that old lord had appeared before her in the light of a generous benefactor, proffering her succour with even the minutest portion of that colossal wealth which he lavished upon profligacies and dissipations, but which she could turn to so many useful and noble purposes,—if it were thus as a disinterested friend that he had addressed her, she could have fallen down at his feet—she could have worshipped him—she could have

bathed his hand with her tears, or have pressed it, all shrivelled as it was, to her lips! Nay, more—forgetting his ugliness, and utterly losing sight of the loathsomeness of his made-up appearance, she could have embraced him as a daughter might fling her arms round the neck of a kind old grandsire! But, alas, it was not in the light of a benefactor that the old nobleman—as old in iniquity as he was in years—stood before her: but it was as a tempter—and though ready and willing to lavish countless showers of gold upon her in return for her virtue, yet not a single piece of the glittering metal would be placed in her hand through pure friendship!

The young girl had shivered and shuddered as if she had felt herself standing on the edge of a dizzy precipice, over the brink of which the touch of a feather or the breath of the lightest zephyr would precipitate her: and for a few moments she felt herself falling.

But the feeling was only transient: the golden vision was suddenly put away from her view by the strong hand of her own immaculate virtue; and if for an instant she had thought of succumbing for the sake of her afflicted mother and her poor little brother, it was now the image of that parent and the recollection of that sweet boy which suddenly armed her with all the strength to resist the temptation!

"My lord," she replied, in a calm tone of decision, "you are privileged to obtrude yourself in this place—privileged also to utter what language you choose to the poor ballet-girl: but *she* also has her privilege—the only one she possesses—which is, to reject your offers with scorn, as I do now."

And having thus spoken, Henrietta Leyden passed abruptly away; and gliding amidst the throng that filled the Concert Room, she hastened to one of the dressing-chambers, where she remained alone with her own thoughts until the bell rang to summon her to that stage where her dance was to be feathery light though her heart was leaden heavy, and her countenance to be wreathed into smiles though inwardly her spirit was weeping the bitterest, bitterest tears!

Contrast for a moment the behaviour of Emily Archer and Henrietta Leyden—the former a Star of the Ballet, with a handsome salary that was in itself sufficient to provide her with luxuries as well as comforts—the latter an obscure novice in the corps, with a wretched pittance that did not allow her even the bare necessaries of life: the former plunging into dissipation and vice without an excuse — the latter avoiding temptation though with every excuse to succumb: the former selling her charms for superfluities—the latter preserving her virtue though in want of necessaries! Truly, Henrietta Leyden was an exception to the general rule. Yet, thank God! for the credit of humanity and the honour of the female sex, there *are* such exceptions; and it is the proudest moment of the author's power when he can illustrate them, as it ought to be the happiest one in the reader's recreation when he can contemplate them.

CHAPTER XXII.

HENRIETTA LEYDEN.

THE Ballet had commenced; and Angela Vivaldi, more brilliant and more beautiful if possible than ever, was received with enthusiastic plaudits. Her's was a style of dancing which combined so much exquisite refinement of modesty and such winning grace, that she appealed far less to the sense than to the sentiment of those who possessed souls capable of being moved by the dancer's more chastening effects. Never with her was it a study to adopt voluptuous attitudes, nor make meretricious displays of her charms. There was a purity of soul shining as it were through her—a halo of innocence and chastity surrounding her—a perfume of virginal freshness filling the atmosphere in which she moved. She danced not to please the libertine, but to chasten him: not to excite the passions, but to absorb them as it were in the more elevated feeling of a poetic refinement.

At first she danced alone: then she was joined by two other leading members of the Ballet; and the three together, personifying the Graces, performed a measure which by its elegance and its tasteful simplicity enchanted all the spectators. The beauteous Angela, with her long dark hair playing in ringlets upon her ivory shoulders, held a garland of flowers in her right hand—while her two companions made a gauzy scarf float high above their heads. The three threw all the lyrical sweetness of poesy into their performance, so that while their airily bounding and flitting forms displayed every grace for which the dance affords such admirable scope, there was nothing in gesture, movement, attitude, or look, to shock the most punctilious observer, if any such were present. But then Angela's companions caught as it were the chastening spirit which animated herself; and never had they themselves performed with such magical effect.

But when the Signora Vivaldi retired from the stage, and was succeeded by the full corps of the ballet, how different was the dance which took place! Then meretricious looks were thrown around—then voluptuous attitudes were studied—and then, too, was it naught save an appeal to the sensuousness instead of the sense of all the spectators. Unless, perhaps, in the case of Henrietta Leyden: but she, poor girl, played too obscure a part in the mazy and intricate routine of the ballet, either to attract any particular degree of attention to herself or to give effect to the chastity of her own style. Suddenly, in the midst of the dance, so quick and violent a paroxysm of intense feeling seized upon her—all the tenderest emotions surging up as it were to the very lips and to the eyes of the poor girl—that it seemed as if she must burst into tears: and catching the opportunity of being close by the wings she retreated from the stage. To the angry demand of the ballet-master, whom she at once encountered there, she replied in a broken voice that she had been taken with indisposition; and as she was but a mere accessory easy to be dispensed with, and whose absence would not be missed, he said no more. Nor did he trouble himself any farther about the poor girl or her indispo-

sition the next instant after she had disappeared from his view.

The tears had now gushed forth from her eyes, and she sped to the nearest dressing-room, anxious to escape from the notice of those amongst whom she hurriedly passed—performers, carpenters, scene-shifters, and others. In the confusion of her feelings and in her haste to conceal them, she did not notice that she had opened the door of a chamber which was not her own; and rushing abruptly in, she perceived not her mistake until all in a moment she found herself in the presence of Angela Vivaldi. Then, casting through her tears a rapid glance around, the poor girl discovered that she had entered the wrong room.

Starting back, Henrietta began to stammer forth some words of apology: when Angela said, in the kindest voice and with the sweetest manner possible, "You have given no offence: it was a mistake on your part. But heavens! you are weeping. Surely it is not because you are afraid——"

"No, signora," Henrietta hastened to exclaim, "I am not afraid of having offended you: for you have spoken kindly to me," she added, in a lower voice and with a more deliberate tone: "and it is so seldom—so very seldom that any one speaks kindly to me!"

Angela Vivaldi's heart was melted by the poor girl's words and manner, and also by the melancholy look which, with her soft blue eyes, Henrietta bent upon the brilliant *danseuse;* and turning round to her lady's-maid, who was in attendance, Angela motioned her to shut the door, near the threshold of which Henrietta was still lingering.

"Now sit down," continued Signora Vivaldi, taking the girl's hand, and literally compelling her to occupy the chair to which she led her: for though they were both dancers, yet as the reader has seen, the ballet has its aristocracy, and while poor Henrietta was in the lowest plebeian rank of the corps, Signora Vivaldi occupied the highest patrician eminence—and therefore the former felt as timid and bashful in the presence of the latter as a milliner's apprentice when waiting upon a duchess. "Now tell me why you were weeping," resumed Angela Vivaldi: "has something annoyed you? Even now your heart is full, and you are sobbing. Maria," she added, turning to her lady's-maid, "give her a glass of wine—she is unwell."

Maria, who was a good-natured, steady, respectable woman, midway between thirty and forty years of age, hastened to place a decanter of wine and some biscuits upon the table: then filling a glass, she handed it to Henrietta, saying, "Take this, my poor child—it will do you good."

Miss Leyden raised the glass to her lips, and was about to sip the wine—for she did indeed feel faint and ill: but at that same instant the idea flashed across her that if her poor mother had but the single glass of wine which she now held in her hand, it would cheer her—it would do her good! And as for that plate of cakes, how the poor girl would have liked to take some of them home to her little brother! Suddenly bursting forth into a fresh paroxysm of grief, she put the untasted glass down upon the table: and then, unable to prevent herself from giving full vent to the anguish which had now fairly broken down all the last remaining barriers which had hitherto kept it pent up, she covered her face with her two small thin hands and sobbed bitterly.

Angela Vivaldi did not immediately attempt to console the poor girl: she knew that this outpouring of affliction would disburthen her heart of the severity of the woe that weighed upon it. But at length she said, in that soft and gentle voice which makes woman a ministering angel even unto one of her own sex, "Tell me what it is that afflicts you—and perhaps it will be in my power to alleviate your sorrow."

"Oh, signora!" exclaimed Henrietta Leyden, suddenly removing her hands from her countenance and gazing with her tearful eyes upon the eminently beautiful features on which she read an expression of the sincerest sympathy, "it is so hard to be compelled to dance when the soul is filled with anguish. Besides, it seems to be such a dreadful mockery to play one's part in a performance that is intended only for the gay and happy, when the heart is ready to break."

"And is such your case, poor girl?" asked Angela, upon whose long dark lashes the diamond tear-drops were now glittering.

"Alas, yes!" was the mournful reply. "It was in the middle of the ballet that I was seized with such a sudden sensation of indescribable woe, as the contrast was all in a moment forced upon my mind between the brilliant scene spreading out before me and the sorrowful one which I had left at home, and to which I am about to return."

"Now tell me your name, and everything that relates to you," said Angela, in the kindest and most soothing manner.

Henrietta answered the question by giving those few particulars concerning her mother and her brother which we have already lightly sketched forth: then she added, with a sudden outburst of impassioned feeling, "Ah! signora, it is not only cruel to suffer thus, but dreadful to think that through such sufferings the gold of the tempter often prevails! I have resisted hitherto: but heaven alone knows——"

She stopped suddenly short, and cast down her eyes in shame at having even so far given an expression to the dread apprehension that there was a possibility of her ultimately succumbing.

"Miss Leyden," said the eminent *danseuse*, taking Henrietta's hand, "you must allow me to be of some service to you. But no one need know anything about it; and if you do not wish to continue your present avocation——However," she observed, suddenly checking herself, as she felt that it would be imprudent to promise too much to one who was almost a total stranger to her—for Angela knew little or nothing of the generality of the ballet-dancers: "however, we will talk more upon that subject on a future occasion. Have the kindness to give me your address—there are writing-materials on the table before you—and to-morrow you will receive a visit from some one who may perhaps be inclined to assist you."

With these words Angela Vivaldi rose from the seat which she had taken close to Henrietta: and advancing to a chest of drawers where her purse lay, she took out some money, wrapped it up in a little piece of paper, and then returning towards the table where Henrietta was writing down her

address, she bent over her and said whisperingly, "This will suffice, poor girl, for your immediate wants."

Miss Leyden, whose heart was now swelling almost to bursting, but with emotions very far different from those which she had so recently experienced, pressed to her lips the hand that had placed the little packet in her own; while she endeavoured to murmur forth some words expressive of her gratitude—but her utterance was choked, and beyond a few broken syllables she could say nothing.

"Hasten home to your mother, my young friend," said Angela; "and do not be afraid that I shall forget you."

Henrietta went forth from the presence of Signora Vivaldi with feelings which can be better understood than described. It was not so much because the eminent *danseuse* had put money into her hand—for she knew not yet how much the paper contained: but it was because such compassionate sympathy had been shown her—because she had been treated with kindness—and because at parting Angela had called her by the name of "friend." Oh! for the humble and obscure ballet-girl, with eight shillings a-week, to be suddenly admitted to the friendship of the renowned *danseuse* whose path was paved with gold and strewed with flowers! Oh! to have won the sympathy of her whose high and brilliant position she had so often envied! It appeared to be a dream—a vision from which there would be the sad wakening of disappointment.

On hastening to the dressing-room which she and all the inferior members of the ballet had in common amongst themselves, Henrietta lost no time in putting off her gauzy raiment, washing the rouge from her cheeks, and resuming her own apparel. But, ah! how different now did the young girl look! Her countenance was pale—very pale, even to sickliness; and yet she seemed far more sweetly interesting in her pallor than when the roseate tint of art was spread upon her cheeks to mock the pensiveness of her beauty. But her attire—how plain, how scant even to meanness, was it! Nevertheless her clothes were as scrupulously neat and clean as their dire poverty would permit them to be. The cotton dress was faded—the shawl was worn threadbare—the ribbons of the cheap straw-bonnet showed that they had been long in use. Poor girl, what more could she do for herself upon eight shillings a week — with an invalid mother, and a little brother of seven years old, too young to earn aught on his own account!

Henrietta had concealed Angela's gift in her bosom, because several other ballet-girls were changing their apparel in the dressing-room at the same time; nor even when beyond the threshold of the Opera House and in the street, did she pause to ascertain to what extent Angela's generosity had gone. Her heart was so full of the new emotions which such unlooked-for and unusual sympathy had excited, that she felt they were even too sacred to be disturbed by the selfish and worldly-minded proceeding of counting the contents of the paper: and so she sped on homeward, without enlightening herself upon that point, or even experiencing the wish to do so. It was a luxury, novel and ineffable, for the poor girl to think of the kindness whereof she had been the object, so that the circumstance of the money-gift was for the moment of the least importance in her thoughts.

Let us now turn our attention for a few minutes to the interior of a room, or rather an attic, belonging to a house in one of the confined, dirty, and gloomy-looking courts leading out of Little Pulteney Street, Soho. Although two o'clock in the morning, yet a light burnt in that attic: but it was only a miserable rush-candle, which just alleviated the darkness and shadowed forth the poverty-stricken appearance of the room. The little window had originally possessed six panes of glass, of a very small size: two of these alone remained, and the vacant squares were covered with paper. A crazy bedstead with a flock bed—two chairs—a small table—a washing-stand—and a few cooking utensils, comprised the whole of the furniture of the wretched attic. Yet everything was scrupulously clean.

In the bed lay a female of about forty, and whose pale and emaciated countenance, sunken eyes, and thin wasted arms, denoted the invalid. Indeed, it appeared as if the hand of death were already upon her. She was awake—and with her head supported on one arm, was contemplating the countenance of a pretty but delicate-looking little boy who lay fast asleep by her side. The child, who was about seven years old, had the most beautiful chesnut hair that ever was seen;—curling naturally about his well-shaped little head, it was as soft and silken as that of a girl. The poor mother, as she bent over her sleeping darling, showed by the nervous compression of her lips that she could scarcely subdue an outburst of grief; and unconsciously on her part did two tears drop from her eyes upon the cheek of the child. It was not till she perceived them that she felt that she was weeping; and she kissed away from her boy's face the tears she had thus let fall.

"Poor child!" she thought to herself, "what is to become of thee? I shall not long remain to watch over you: I feel that death will soon come to claim me as his own! O Almighty God! have mercy upon this poor innocent child, who has done no harm—who is incapable of doing harm! Alas, alas! if it were not impious, I could wish, my darling little Charley, that you had never been born. Oh! how strange it is that according as we are rich or poor, do our children prove the objects of pleasure or of pain. Had I the means to make thee happy, poor child, how rejoiced should I be to possess thee; but now that I am steeped to the very lips in poverty, and that within the four narrow walls of this wretched chamber hunger is often our guest, I sorrow that thou, my poor child, wast ever born to so much misery! Your sister has to toil for us both,—for thee, helpless little one—and for me, her equally helpless mother! O, my God!" exclaimed Mrs. Leyden aloud, as a terrible idea flashed across her mind, "extend thine all-protecting influence over my poor Henrietta! I shudder when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed,—temptations which her own exalted sense of virtue makes her recoil from, but to which, alas! a prolongation of so much misery may in a moment of despair drive her to succumb. Oh! how I tremble every time she goes forth to the fulfilment of her arduous duties. I think to myself, *'Thou leavest this abode of poverty pure and chaste, my Henrietta; but is it not to be dreaded that the day may come when you*

will return with the blush of shame upon your cheeks and not daring to meet the gaze of thy mother!'"

Overpowered by the thought, the unhappy woman threw herself back upon the bolster—for pillow there was none; and covering her face with her emaciated hands, she sobbed aloud. Little Charles, being disturbed by the sounds of his mother's grief, awoke and began to cry. Throwing his arms about her neck, he said, "Don't be unhappy, dear mamma!"—and in his own pretty childish way he did all he could to console her.

Now, the very endearments of that child, so far from pouring balm into the heart of the unhappy woman, were like so many daggers plunging down into it: for with irresistible force rushed a thousand harrowing reflections to her mind. Was it not shocking that a child of such a sweet and affectionate disposition should be doomed to the sad fate of poverty and misery, and perhaps want?—for though the mother and daughter had hitherto managed, even by dire self-privation, to give the poor little fellow enough bread to eat, yet how long might their ability to do so last? Suppose that Henrietta lost her engagement at the Opera, what would become of them? and when the season was over, if she should fail to obtain another engagement, what *then* were they to do? Oh! all this was more than the poor woman could endure to think of; and yet the terrible questions were incessantly forcing themselves upon her! No wonder, then, that as she now took that dearly-beloved child in her arms and strained him to her bosom, his very endearments and caresses should make her feel all the more acutely the anguish and agony of her position, and dread all the more poignantly for his own future destiny. The little fellow sobbed himself off to sleep again upon his mother's breast; and then, as she once more contemplated his sweetly beautiful countenance—all the more beautiful because replete with childhood's innocent expression—and as she lovingly played with his silken chesnut hair, she again found herself giving way to her despondent musings.

"Poor child! passing the greater portion of your days in the sickly atmosphere of this wretched room, perhaps art thou imbibing the seeds of disease and death from that mother who gave thee life! Alas! is it indeed a mortal sickness which has fastened itself upon me? must I die soon? am I sinking and fading away? or is it through want, and privation, and sorrow that I am thus stretched upon this sick-bed? My sweet boy, how cheerfully would I surrender up my life this moment if it would ensure thine happiness and prosperity! Thou, thy poor mother's darling—how rejoiced should I be if I had the means of giving thee toys to play with, and pretty clothes to wear, and an airy wholesome room to sleep in, and good food to eat. But thy cheeks are pale, my poor little fellow, for want of proper nourishment and fresh air. Oh! if we had but a cottage in the country, were it ever so humble, that you might frolic about in the green fields and that the colour should come back to your cheeks——But, no no—this may not be—this never will be! Poverty has laid its hand upon us—penury is our doom—wretchedness our fate. May God grant, my poor boy, that all these evils blight not the purity of your sweet sister. Oh! let us suffer all that we do suffer, with resignation—aye, even with cheerfulness—so long as my own Henrietta remains the good and virtuous girl that she is at present. But when I think of the temptations to which she is exposed—the heartless libertines who frequent that place—and the sufferings which she sees her mother and her brother experience, I tremble—Oh! how I tremble, lest when in her despair she stretches out her hand to God, the infamy of man may drop gold into that appealing palm!"

At this moment Mrs. Leyden's ear caught the sound of a light step ascending the stairs,—ascending too more lightly and with a greater elasticity than ever, light and elastic though that step always was; and it was also with a greater precipitation than usual that Henrietta threw open the door and made her appearance. Her cheeks, that were wont to be so pale, were glowing with excitement—her eyes, habitually so mild and soft in their pensive expression, had dancing light in their looks—and her sweet lips were wreathed into a sunny smile. The poor mother instantaneously caught some faint reflection of that joyousness which invested her daughter: for it struck her that the poor girl had received a little increase of salary—perhaps a shilling or two; and such a circumstance would indeed be fraught with hope and bliss for a family that had to count and weigh well the pence that it daily disbursed.

"Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed Henrietta, flinging her arms about Mrs. Leyden's neck, "such good news! I have found so kind a friend!"

"A friend, my child?" echoed Mrs. Leyden, with a sudden paroxysm of affright: for what friend was a pretty young girl of sixteen, belonging to the ballet, and therefore regarded as a legitimate object for every libertine overture,—what sort of a friend was such a girl likely to find?

"Yes, dear mother—a good and generous friend, who took compassion upon me," continued Henrietta, with rapid and excited utterance; and she perceived not the sudden alarm which had struck with so sickening a sensation to the heart of her mother. "I have money about me—I know not yet how much it is: but let us see."

"Money, child?" murmured Mrs. Leyden, sinking back upon the bolster.

"Yes—look, dear mother!" cried the exultant Henrietta, as she took the little packet from her bosom and opened it. "Heavens! gold! five sovereigns! Oh!"—and the poor girl, overcome by her feelings at finding pounds where she had perhaps only thought of shillings, burst into tears.

"Henrietta!" almost shrieked forth her mother, now springing frantically up on the wretched couch: "answer me as you would reply to your God! That gold——"

"Good heavens, mother!" cried the damsel now all in an instant comprehending what was passing in Mrs. Leyden's mind: "do you think so ill of your daughter? No, no—thank God, it is not so!"

And with a cold shudder at the bare idea—likewise with a cruel revulsion of feeling produced by her parent's dishonouring suspicion—she sank down on her knees at the side of the bed, and wept bitterly. Little Charley, awakened by these rapid ejaculations on the part of his mother and sister, sat up and began to cry.

"Henrietta—my dearest child," exclaimed the unhappy woman, "if I have wronged you, forgive me—Oh, forgive me!"

"Alas, alas!" cried Henrietta hysterically: "I am virtuous, and pure, and innocent: and yet for all this I obtained not credit even with my own mother!"

"Dearest child, this reproach tortures me almost to madness!"—and Mrs. Leyden wrung her hands bitterly.

"Miserable gold!" exclaimed Henrietta, springing up from her knees with a look of despair: "the want of it produces misery, and the possession of it brings a darker misery still! Mother, you have wronged me—and this from you—O God! I should never have expected it!"

"Sister, dear sister," said poor little Charley, frightened at what was passing; "do not speak so to dear mamma!"

"Oh, my beloved brother!" exclaimed Henrietta, straining the little fellow to her bosom, "but a few minutes back I was dreaming—fondly dreaming, of brighter days for you: but now all is dark—darker than ever! Perish that gold since it has made my very mother suspect me!"—and suddenly relinquishing the fervid clasp in which she had held her brother, Henrietta snatched up the five sovereigns which she had thrown upon the bed, and was about to dash her hand through the window to fling them forth, when a hollow groan from her mother's lips suddenly made her pause. "Heavens! what have I done? Dear mother, you are fainting!"

"No—I shall be better in a few moments. Give me some water, my dear child."

The gold dropped from Henrietta's hand, as she flew to fill a cup with water and place it to her mother's lips. Then she sprinkled a few drops upon that pale and emaciated countenance, while little Charley sat up in the bed gazing in blank consternation upon what was passing: for the child could not possibly understand the nature of this scene—but the terror of which hushed his crying and made him speechless."

"Dear Henrietta," said Mrs. Leyden, now somewhat recovering, "I have wronged you—I see that I have most fearfully wronged you; and till the last day of my life shall I regret it. But, Oh! it is misery which warps our hearts—misery that fills us with suspicion—misery that changes our very natures—misery that blights all the freshest feelings of confidence——"

"My dear mother, let us say no more upon the subject," interrupted Henrietta—but yet in a voice which showed how deeply shocked her soul had been and how cruel was the wound that her mother's suspicion had inflicted on her heart. "The friend whom heaven has sent us, is Angela Vivaldi, the kindest, the best, the most generous of beings!"

"Henrietta, can you forgive me—can you pardon your poor mother? Oh! that I could recall the incidents of the last few minutes!"

"Forgive you, dear mother? do not speak to me thus!"—and the gentle girl again flung her arms about her parent's neck.

Then little Charley began crying once more; but now it was rather in joy than otherwise, when he beheld his sister and mother embracing.

Henrietta proceeded to inform Mrs. Leyden of everything which had occurred to her that night at the Opera, and with which the reader is already acquainted. Frankly did she explain the overtures made to her by Lord Everton—the feelings which had seized upon her when in the middle of the dance—and then the scene that had ensued in Signora Vivaldi's dressing-chamber. Mrs. Leyden embraced her daughter again and again: and again and again too did she implore that good girl's forgiveness on account of having even for an instant mistrusted her purity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VISITOR.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon that Henrietta ascended the stairs leading to the attic, having been out to make some purchases. Her step was light, and there was gladness in her heart: but there would have been more elasticity in the former and a purer bliss in the latter, if that distressing scene had not taken place a few hours back with her mother. For though the poor girl had freely and frankly forgiven her parent—and though she resolved to appear to think no more of that occurrence—yet was the wound still bleeding in her heart; for she could not help saying to herself, "My mother suspected me—and therefore she has no confidence in my virtue!"

Yet, when she entered the attic and began to display her purchases upon the table, the disagreeable impression left upon her mind by the incident just referred to temporarily vanished; because she experienced so true and heartfelt a pleasure at beholding the joy which beamed in the eyes of her pretty little brother. From her basket Henrietta took out a variety of provisions and other articles, including many little comforts for her invalid mother; and then she produced a complete new suit of clothes for Charley. Mrs. Leyden, half sitting up in the bed, watched her daughter's proceedings; and when the basket was emptied, she said, "Henrietta, you have bought nothing for yourself?"

"Oh, I require nothing at present!" exclaimed the young girl. "Now, Charley, let me put you on your new things."

Then, with what heartfelt pleasure did Henrietta disapparel her brother of his old garments, and substitute the tasteful though modest suit she had brought him in. And he, poor boy, exhibited all that childish delight which is so joyous to contemplate on the part of the young! Then, having finished dressing him, Henrietta took a comb and arranged his beautiful chesnut hair in a way to set off his sweet but delicate countenance to the utmost advantage.

Scarcely had all this been done, and while Henrietta and Mrs. Leyden were still admiring little Charley's appearance in his new clothes, footsteps were heard ascending the stairs, and a man's voice saying, "There, my good woman, you need not come any farther: I shall find my way. The door at the top, you say—the one facing the stairs? There, you need not follow me, I tell you. Oh! I suppose you want something for your trouble? Stop—here's a shilling—and now pray let me find my way alone. Indeed, I must insist upon it."

These words were addressed to the landlady of

the house—an officious, obtrusive, inquisitive kind of person, who, seeing that the visitor was evidently a man of substance, had endeavoured to push her way along with him in order to ascertain what he could possibly want with the Leydens. But he had got rid of her as much by his peremptory manner as by the donation of the shilling; and almost immediately afterwards Mrs. Leyden and her children heard his footsteps halt at their door, at which he immediately knocked.

Henrietta opened it, and found herself in the presence of an old gentleman with a brown scratch-wig, a red face, a large double chin, and a short stout figure.

"Your name is Henrietta Leyden, I suppose?" said the gentleman: then catching sight of the invalid woman in bed, he observed in a blunt off-hand manner, "Don't mind me; I come with no hostile intent—it may be otherwise:"—and he unceremoniously walked into the room.

Henrietta shut the door, and at once placed a seat for the visitor's accommodation: for it struck her that this was an emissary from the kind-hearted Angela Vivaldi. Mrs. Leyden, who, the moment the knock sounded at the door, had settled herself in bed so as to be prepared for the presence of any visitor, entertained the same idea; and little Charley stood gazing upon the gentleman with childish wonder as to what he wanted.

"You expected a call from some one this morning?" said that individual, addressing himself to Henrietta. "I know all that took place last night between you and Signora Vivaldi, with whom I have the honour to be acquainted; and she told me of your position—also of what she had given you. I suppose a part of the money has gone to dress this little fellow out in these new clothes? Well, he's a pretty little boy. What's your name, sir?"

"Charley Leyden, please sir," responded the child.

"And I suppose you are very fond of your sister?" asked the gentleman.

"Oh! yes, sir—she is so good and kind to me—and she gave me these new clothes just now."

"And parted your hair for you, and made you look smart——eh, my boy?"

For a moment Charley was at a loss to understand whether the gentleman spoke in a scolding manner or not; and he looked up with a somewhat frightened glance towards his sister.

"Oh, I am not angry!" exclaimed the visitor, drawing the boy towards him and smoothing down his hair: "you are a nice little fellow—but you ought to have more colour upon those cheeks. Well, we shall see. Madam," he continued, turning towards Mrs. Leyden, "you are an invalid. Pray, have you been ill long?"

"I have been suffering much for several months past," replied Mrs. Leyden; "and if it were not for that dear sweet girl, I know not what would have become of me and her little brother," she added, the tears trickling down her cheeks.

"How much do you earn a-week?" asked the gentleman, somewhat abruptly fixing his eyes on Henrietta.

"Eight shillings, sir," was the reply.

"Well, you had five pounds given you by Signora Vivaldi last night. Let us see what you have done with it?"

"First of all, sir," returned Henrietta, "I paid three weeks' rent, which we had unfortunately fallen in arrear——"

"How much was that?"

"Seven shillings and sixpence, sir. We pay half-a-crown a week for this room——"

"It would be dear at a gift," ejaculated the visitor, whose principal characteristic seemed to be a strange and almost uncouth sort of bluntness. "Well, go on—what did you do next?"

"I paid the chemist, sir, who had been kind enough to give us credit for some little medicines that my mother required. Then I bought some tea and sugar, some sago, and a few other little things that I thought would do my mother good. I also redeemed some linen from the pawnbroker's," added Henrietta, in a trembling voice and with blushing cheeks.

"Linen? I suppose for your own wear?"

"No, sir—to make my mother more comfortable," answered Henrietta, with a look that showed she was somewhat hurt by the question.

"Well—and then you bought these fine clothes for the little fellow here—eh?"

"Yes, sir; he was almost in rags. The suit he has now on cost fifteen shillings. I know it was a great deal to give in our condition: but, poor child, I could not bear to see him as he was:"—and the tears rolled down Henrietta's pale cheeks.

"Now you have told me all you bought for your mother and the boy—what did you buy for yourself? Come," exclaimed the gentleman, somewhat peremptorily, "show me the new dress or new shawl, whatever it was."

"I can assure you, sir," cried Mrs. Leyden, perceiving that her daughter was distressed by the question, "that this dear girl expended not a single sixpence upon herself—no, not even to the redemption of her Sunday clothing from the pawnbroker's."

"Oh!" muttered the visitor. "Have you many things in pledge?"

"Everything," replied Mrs. Leyden, bursting into tears.

"I don't know much about those sort of things," said the gentleman; "but I believe that the pawnbroker gives you duplicates—does he not? Come, let me see them all."

Mrs. Leyden made an affirmative sign to Henrietta, who forthwith produced from a drawer a considerable quantity of pawnbrokers' tickets, which with trembling hands and blushing cheeks she laid upon the table.

"You have not always been poor," said the gentleman, as he examined the duplicates one after another. "Here is one for a ring—another for a watch—another for a pair of earrings: then we have gowns—blankets—sheets—God bless me! what a miscellaneous assortment of things, even down to petticoats and stockings!"

Although both Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta felt in their hearts that the old gentleman did not mean to be cruel, but that on the contrary he probably meant to give them some relief—yet they could not help feeling a little shocked at the apparently blunt and unfeeling manner, amounting almost to coarseness and indelicacy, with which he spoke of the articles that were pledged, and which might have shown him how bitter had been the need that had reduced

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them to such straits. But he did not seem to take any notice of the emotions his words and manner thus excited; and having scrutinized the duplicates, he gathered them all up in a methodical way, wrapped them in paper and thrust them into his capacious breeches-pocket.

"I shall take care of these and look over them again at my leisure," he said: then fixing his eyes upon Henrietta, he asked, "Do you like the stage? and do you want to keep on it?"

She burst into tears, as if the very question were an insult to her pure and delicate feelings.

"I could worship the generous benefactor," cried Mrs. Leyden, "who would enable that dear girl to quit a profession which she abhors, and to which nothing but a dire necessity could have induced her to have recourse. When we were first reduced to distress, she endeavoured to support us by needlework: but it was so precarious and so badly paid——"

"Of course it is!" ejaculated the visitor. "Don't you know that in this Christian country which gave twenty millions to emancipate the black slaves in the West Indies, there are swarms and swarms of white slaves for whom this same Christian country would not voluntarily give twenty million pence? But no matter: let us talk of your own affairs. Do you think, ma'am, that you could bear removal from this wretched den to a little better lodging, if such were provided for you?"

Mrs. Leyden, in a few words,—but these were uttered in a tone of deepest feeling,—gave the gentleman to understand that she thought and hoped her indisposition had been produced, and indeed was now continued, more by want of proper nourishment and by grief and anxiety than by anything more serious; and while she was speaking Henrietta gazed with mingled hope and suspense upon the visitor's countenance, in order to gleam from its expression whether she dared anticipate that such a change could be effected on her mother's behalf as the one he had alluded to.

"Well," he said, with looks that were inscrutable, "we must see what is to be done. I think that you are a very good girl, Miss Henrietta: for the moment you got money, you did not go and dress yourself out in finery as most young persons of your age would have done,—and besides, you thought of your mother and brother first. I am very well pleased at that. As for the fifteen shillings you spent in embellishing this little fellow here, I can't find it in my heart to blame you for the outlay, although it was rather extravagant: he is a sweet boy, and it's natural to wish to see him look well. I do not mean to say any more at present—but it's very likely you will hear from me again."

When the eccentric visitor had taken his leave, little Charley caught hold of his sister's hand, saying, "I don't like that old gentleman: he seems so cross and ill-tempered, and he made you cry once——"

"Yes, my dear Charley: but you must like him, though," returned Henrietta; "for he is no doubt a very good man. Oh, my dear mother!" exclaimed the young girl, turning towards her parent, "is there not now some beam of hope for us?"

"I think so. Pray God that it is so!" answered Mrs. Leyden.

Henrietta now hastened to prepare some good and nutritious food for her invalid mother: but while she was so doing she experienced a gradual return of that feeling of sadness which had arisen from the distressing scene of the previous night. The thought that she had been suspected by her mother rankled in the poor girl's heart—not with any sentiment of bitterness against that parent, whom she forgave from the bottom of her soul; but with a deep sorrow to think that her own conduct had not been sufficient in all its purity to guarantee her against such an injurious suspicion.

Mrs. Leyden, who watched her attentively during her present occupation, observed the natural pensiveness of her countenance gradually deepening into mournfulness: and she divined the cause. But she thought that the best plan under present circumstances was to say nothing more upon the subject. Not that she was above repeating her prayer for forgiveness at her daughter's hand; but because she fancied that the less that was said upon the matter the sooner the impression of it would wear away from the young girl's mind. Besides, if any portion of the promises at which their late visitor had hinted should receive fulfilment, Mrs. Leyden cheered herself with the hope that in the joyous excitement produced by a change of circumstances, Henrietta would very speedily forget the little incident which was now occupying her thoughts. Nor did Mrs. Leyden fail to perceive something that might even be termed satisfactory in the way that Henrietta had taken the thing to heart: for did it not prove that the young maiden was delicately sensitive in respect to her virtue, and that the least breath of suspicion tarnishing the fair mirror of her reputation was esteemed by her as a misfortune not to be borne?

A more comfortable meal than for many a long day had been partaken of by this family, was presently served up by Henrietta's own hands; and when she saw how her little brother enjoyed himself, and how her mother's spirits were rallying under the genial influences of hope, the poor girl's countenance again brightened up, and she appeared to forget the occurrence which had been troubling her.

Scarcely was the meal over, when heavy footsteps were heard ascending the stairs: then there was a loud knock at the chamber-door—and on little Charley, who was now all life and spirits, rushing forward to answer the summons, a man in the garb of an hotel-porter made his appearance laden with packages. The instant Henrietta's eyes embraced those packages at a glance, she recognised the numerous parcels which from time to time, and with almost a breaking heart, she had borne to the pawnbroker's;—and if on those occasions she had wept bitter tears of hopelessness and despair, she now burst into tears again, but with joy, and gratitude, and gladness!

"A gentleman has sent me up with all these things," observed the porter, who was a good-tempered fellow himself and had not failed to comprehend that he had been made, though humbly and partially, the instrument of a good action. "Well, Miss, you had better cry for joy than for sorrow," he went on to say. "But the old gentleman desired me to tell you that you are all to be ready this evening between five and six o'clock, as he shall come and fetch you to go to some nicer lodgings."

Henrietta with a heart almost too full to allow her to speak, endeavoured to induce the porter to take some money: but he declared that he had already been adequately paid—and having deposited the packets upon the table, he took his departure.

"Oh, what a change for us!" murmured Mrs. Leyden, the faintness of an overpowering joy coming over her.

Henrietta hastened to throw her arms round her mother's neck, saying, "Do you think you will be able to get up? Oh, I hope so! for now that you have got all your nice clothes again, and can go forth respectable as you were wont to do——"

"Believe me, my dear child," responded Mrs. Leyden, straining her daughter to her bosom, and then lavishing her caresses upon little Charley who had advanced up to the side of the couch, "I am ten thousand times more gratified for your sake that all this has happened, than for my own. Yes, my dear girl, I feel myself years younger, alike in health and spirits. Oh! it is necessary to drink deeply of the bitter waters of adversity in order to appreciate the sweetness of the returning fount of prosperity."

By the time another hour had elapsed a great change had taken place in the appearance of the mother and daughter. Mrs. Leyden, having risen from her wretched pallet, had apparelled herself in a simple but genteel manner; while Henrietta had exchanged a faded and scanty garb for one which, without the slightest taint of finery, was alike elegant and tasteful. If in her discarded apparel she had seemed sweetly interesting, she now appeared exquisitely beautiful. Upon her cheeks, previously so very pale, there was now a delicate tint of the rose, but which even in its faintness and its delicacy was lovelier far than the bloom which art was wont to shed upon her countenance when she danced at the Opera. The expression of her features was now bashfully charming rather than touchingly plaintive; and there was a mild lustre in the beautiful blue eyes which were half veiled beneath their thick dark fringes. The symmetry of her figure was admirably set off by the genteel and lady-like garb that she had put on; and altogether Henrietta's appearance was so improved by the advantage of dress, that Mrs. Leyden, with all a fond mother's pride, surveyed her with admiring looks.

"How pretty you seem now, sister," said little Charley, joy beaming in his eyes. "I am so glad you have got all these nice clothes—and mamma too."

In short the happiness of this little family seemed nearly complete; and Henrietta thought no more—at least for the present—of that incident which had at first so much afflicted her. It was now past three o'clock, as Mrs. Leyden perceived by her watch, which was amongst the things so generously redeemed for her from the pawnbroker's, and which she had already wound up.

"I promised to attend the ballet-master to-day at this hour," said Henrietta, suddenly recollecting her engagement. "What shall I do?"

"If our kind friend does not intend you to continue upon the stage," answered Mrs. Leyden, "you need take no farther notice of that engagement."

"But ought I not," asked Henrietta, "to pen a note expressive of gratitude to the generous-hearted Signora Vivaldi? Oh! I will lose no more time in doing this!"

"But you know not where the Signora lives," observed Mrs. Leyden.

"True!" exclaimed the young girl, with a sudden look of disappointment. "Oh! it would be so sweet, and such a relief to my heart's feelings, to be able to pour forth all my joy and gratitude to that excellent being who evidently has made our case known to this benevolent gentleman."

"He will take charge of your letter, my dear girl," said the mother.

"Oh! but a thing that is done at once always has a truer air of sincerity," exclaimed Henrietta, now fully bent, in the enthusiasm of her feelings, upon carrying out her little project. "I will write my note and take it down to the Opera, so that the Signora may have it with the least possible delay. And at the same time I will make my excuses to the ballet-master; so that if by any accident I should have to return to my recent avocations, I may not make an enemy of him."

A shade gradually fell upon Mrs. Leyden's countenance as Henrietta thus notified her intention of revisiting that establishment which the poor mother held in such horror, and to which dire necessity alone had from the very first constrained her to send her child. Henrietta this time observed not that gathering gloom on her mother's features; but enthusiastic in her resolve to testify her fervid gratitude to Signora Vivaldi, she sat down at the table and penned a letter, the contents of which flowed with as genuine a sincerity from her heart as the tears which she had ere now shed welled forth from the same holy fount of feeling. This pleasing task being accomplished, she put on a simple but pretty bonnet and a neat shawl, selected from the things ere now reclaimed from the pawnbroker's; and having kissed her mother and brother, was about to trip with light step away upon her mission of gratitude.

"Would you not like to take little Charley with you?" asked Mrs. Leyden, concealing beneath a smile the sort of gloomy presentiment which had arisen in her mind at this resolve of her daughter to pay a last visit to the Opera.

"Yes, to be sure!" exclaimed the now happy girl: but then the next moment, as a sudden thought struck her, she said, "No, I cannot. I am going to speak to the ballet-master, and must not take any one behind the scenes with me. Now, my sweet Charley, do not look disappointed; because I shall be back soon—and then, you know, we are all going away together to some nicer place."

Having thus affectionately spoken to her brother, and having again kissed him, Henrietta sallied forth. The landlady of the house, with characteristic inquisitiveness, endeavoured to engage her in a gossip as she was passing out of the front door—for the woman was very anxious to know who the old gentleman was that with a sort of enchanter's wand had appeared to bring so much sudden happiness into the previously wretched chamber inhabited by the Leyden family. But Henrietta would not pause to gratify the landlady's curiosity; and turning out of the dark gloomy court, she gained the street.

Upon being left alone with Charley, Mrs. Leyden relapsed suddenly into a mournful mood. Was it that the sudden presence of so much happiness, by unnaturally exciting her spirits, had led to a proportionate reaction—and that her mind, enfeebled

by illness, was unable long to endure a joy so great that it engendered a mistrustfulness of itself? No doubt this was the explanation of Mrs. Leyden's feelings; and in such a morbid mood it was also natural that she should entertain misgivings in respect to her daughter's sudden and impulsive re-visit to the Opera. Dire misfortune had so warped the poor woman's feelings as to render her somewhat suspicious of every circumstance that might occur, and made her invest the commonest incidents with an air of ominous importance. She accordingly began to fear that Henrietta, having no sooner regained the possession of good clothing, was anxious to display her change of circumstances to her acquaintances at the Opera. The reader will no doubt consider it wrong of Mrs. Leyden to judge her daughter thus,—wrong to form such an opinion of the young girl whose self-denial had been exhibited in so many various ways during their period of poverty especially on that very morning when she had purchased comforts for her brother and her mother, but not even necessaries for herself! Mrs. Leyden felt, too, that she was wrong to give way to these fears and suspicions: but she could not help it—she was not mistress of her thoughts—and they gained upon her. She was naturally a good woman; but the best natures are liable to feelings and weaknesses of this kind—especially when the physical energies have been impaired by sickness, suffering, and calamity.

"An hour passed, and Mrs. Leyden said to herself, "Henrietta ought to return now." Half-an-hour more elapsed—and still she did not come back. Then Mrs. Leyden kept looking at the watch which had that day been restored to her; and this very watch, though affording a proof of returning prosperity, became in another sense a source of pain and anxiety as it indicated the lapse of time during which Henrietta returned not. The incident of the watch affords an illustration of all the circumstances of this world, none of whose pleasures are without pain and none of whose roses are without thorns!

Half-past five o'clock! Henrietta had been absent two hours—and Mrs. Leyden's excitement grew intolerable. She felt very ill again—yet was too nervous to lie down. Little Charley, too young to perceive that his mother was suffering, and too innocent to understand how she could suffer now that she had good clothes and plenty of food again and was going away to a nicer place, as he had been assured,—was amusing himself with the pictures in one of the books which were amongst the things redeemed from the pawnbroker's.

Presently footsteps were heard ascending the stairs; and the elderly gentleman of the morning made his appearance.

"Well, ma'am, I am glad to see you are up," he immediately observed. "Ah! my little fellow, looking at a picture-book—eh? But where is your sister?"

"Henrietta has gone to the Opera, sir, to leave a note of thanks for Signora Vivaldi," said Mrs. Leyden, answering the question.

"That's all very well and good," interrupted the old gentleman: "but she might have given it to me."

"That is what I suggested," rejoined Mrs. Leyden: "but she would take it herself."

"Then I suppose we must wait for her," said the visitor, depositing himself in a chair. "How long has she been gone?"

"Two hours, sir," returned Mrs. Leyden, endeavouring to banish the expression of uneasiness from her countenance.

"Two hours!" ejaculated the gentleman. "That's rather long. It is now more than half past five," he continued, looking at his watch. "Did not the porter tell you I should be here between five and six?"

"He did. And now let me thank you again and again——"

"Nonsense! I don't want thanks. I suppose your daughter will not be long. Come, my little fellow, you and I will look at these books together till your sister comes back."

Another half-hour passed. Mrs. Leyden was suffering excruciations, which she endeavoured to conceal as well as she was able; and the old gentleman began to grow impatient. Another half-hour—then another—till at length it was seven o'clock. Mrs. Leyden, who had frequently turned aside upon her chair to conceal her tears, now burst into a flood of weeping; and becoming dreadfully excited, declared her conviction that something was wrong. The old gentleman said what he could to soothe her, and volunteered to hasten off to the Opera and see if anything was really the matter. He accordingly sped away; and during his absence Mrs. Leyden became so ill that she was compelled to lie down. Little Charley now saw that something fresh had occurred to make his mother unhappy; and she was not able to reassure him. In a little more than half-an-hour the old gentleman came back. He wore a gloomy look—and Mrs. Leyden at once saw that he had no satisfactory tidings for her.

"Your daughter, ma'am," he said, "has been to the Opera. She was there a little after four o'clock, but only stayed a few minutes while she delivered her letter and spoke to the ballet-master. She then took her departure—but was joined at the stage door by some gentleman whose name I could not learn, and with whom she went away."

At this intelligence Mrs. Leyden gave a low moan, and fainted. The old gentleman threw water upon her face, while Charley hastened down to summon the landlady. The unhappy mother regained her senses, but showed every symptom of being very dangerously ill. A doctor was sent for; and he declared that it would be impossible to remove her for the present. The idea of transferring the poor lady to another lodging was consequently abandoned for that evening.

The old gentleman remained at the lodging till past nine o'clock, in the hope that Henrietta would return. But the young girl came not—and Mrs. Leyden upbraided herself bitterly at the cause of what she believed to be her daughter's flight.

"I suspected her virtue—I accused her wrongfully!" she exclaimed with wild accents and passionate gestures; "and the dagger which I planted in her heart has rankled there. Oh, heavens! is it possible that she has gone? has she left the mother who dared suspect her innocence? has she said to herself that it were useless to take a pride henceforth in that virtue for which she obtained not credit? Has she, in short, abandoned herself to guilt in a paroxysm of despair?"

The old gentleman sought an explanation of these

self-accusings on the part of Mrs. Leyden, and when the unhappy mother told him what had taken place when her daughter brought home the gold she had received from Angela Vivaldi—and how the incident had since dwelt in Henrietta's mind—the old gentleman at first became very thoughtful. But at length he said, "You must tranquillize yourself, Mrs. Leyden; for I do not think from what I have seen and heard of your daughter, she would suffer her galled feelings thus to urge her on to so desperate a step as accepting libertine proposals. In any case you will not lose a friend in me. I shall come and see you again to-morrow: but as I feel interested in all that concerns you, mind you send and let me know the instant your daughter comes back. For that she will come back, with a satisfactory account of her present absence, I feel confident. Here is my address."

Thus speaking, the old gentleman laid his card upon the table; and having kissed little Charley, who had gone to bed an hour previously, crying bitterly at his sister's absence,—the eccentric benefactor took his departure. He did not however leave the house without placing gold in the landlady's hands, and desiring her to minister in all possible ways to the comfort and well-being of Mrs. Leyden. But, alas! unhappiness had once again entered that humble chamber,—not the unhappiness produced by poverty, for this evil existed there no longer,—but the unhappiness arising from the disappearance of Henrietta and the self-accusings of her invalid mother.

It appeared from the card which the old gentleman had left upon the table, that the name of the poor family's benefactor was Mr. Jonathan Gunthorpe, and that his address was at the *Bell and Crown*, Holborn.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRECEPTOR AND HIS PUPIL.

THE name of William Deveril has been occasionally mentioned in our pages; and we must now introduce him more particularly to the reader. He was quite a young man; but it was not very easy to fix his exact age to a year or two, because his complexion being rendered somewhat dark by a long residence in a southern clime, together with a certain thoughtfulness of look, possibly made him appear a trifle older than he really was. Thus he might have been a little under twenty or a little above twenty: for with no nicer precision could his age be fixed.

He had dark hair, worn somewhat long, and curling naturally—whiskers which though small increased the manliness of his otherwise youthful appearance—and fine black eyes, beaming with intelligence when not bent down in the mind's abstraction of thought. He was tall and slender, not merely symmetrically formed, but modelled with an Apollo-like grace and elegance. His features were of the Grecian cast—his upper lip short, with that aristocratic curl which may express disdain where there is false pride, but which is equally indicative of a calm and manly dignity where there is no overweening hauteur. His teeth were remarkable for their whiteness and evenness; and there was something peculiarly sweet, though by no means effeminate, in his smile. It denoted a kind disposition and a generous heart, which indications of character were amply corroborated by the high and noble forehead that seemed formed to be crowned with nature's own peerless diadem of intelligence.

William Deveril was accustomed to dress in a style which became a perfect gentleman, but without the least pretension to finery—much less of, mawkish dandyism. Nevertheless, a stranger who beheld that elegant young man, of such exquisite masculine beauty, apparelled in the most becoming style, would have been very far from suspecting that he was anything less than a scion of the aristocracy. And yet, as the reader is already aware, William Deveril earned his bread by giving lessons in drawing, music, and painting upon ivory. But then he had become quite the rage, so to speak, as a professor of these arts; and teaching only in the best families, he was enabled to turn his talents to a very lucrative advantage.

It was about mid-day as Mr. Deveril knocked at the door of Lady Macdonald's mansion in Cavendish Square; and to his questions as to whether Lady Florina Staunton was at home, the footman who answered his summons, replied in the affirmative. The young professor was thereupon conducted to a parlour where he found Lady Florina seated alone.

The young patrician damsel had already arranged upon a table the requisite drawing-materials; and it had been with a fluttering heart that she had counted the minutes until William Deveril made his appearance. Now, as he entered the room, she with that command which a well-bred and modest young female is enabled to exercise over her feelings, received him with that affable courtesy which she was always wont to display towards her young preceptor. Then resuming her seat from which she had risen, she said, "I have done but little, Mr. Deveril, to this picture since you were last here: but I hope to make some progress this morning."

As she thus spoke she bent her head over a piece of ivory, of an oval shape, and about six inches in diameter at its widest part. The subject of the design was a beautiful landscape which the fair pupil was copying from a water colour drawing made by Deveril himself; and so far as her performance had advanced, it gave promise of being a very tolerable imitation of the original.

"Your ladyship has not touched it, I see, since I was here the day before yesterday," observed Deveril, as he glanced at the ivory: then taking a seat near his beautiful pupil, he added, "But if your ladyship can give me an hour to day, some progress will indeed be made."

"I wish to have it finished, Mr. Deveril," answered Florina, "because my aunt is desirous to present it to some one of her acquaintance. I had therefore purposed to beg you to extend the lesson to at least two hours—that is, if it do not interfere with any previous arrangement which you have made."

"And if I had made any, it should cheerfully be put off for your ladyship!" replied Deveril, with a warmth of tone which suddenly made Florina start and the colour rush to her cheeks: for there was something in those accents which touched the tenderest chord that thrilled to her heart's core; for she knew that Deveril loved her, and this was another of those unwitting and almost unconscious proofs of that love which from time to time escaped him.

But how did the innocent and artless Florina know that Deveril loved her? Had he ever declared his passion? No: he had not dared to do so; nor had she ever ventured to encourage him in such daring. But to those who love, the signs and evidences of love in others are as intelligible as a language which though unknown to some, is yet a facile means of interchanging thoughts with those who can speak it. For love has its own peculiar language, which though often ineffable, is nevertheless potent in its silent eloquence,—a language whose syllables, and words, and sentences are expressed by a thousand little circumstances that pass unnoticed by the common observer, but which are full of meaning to those whose hearts afford the key to the reading of those mysteries. Thus a gesture —a suppressed sigh—a look hurriedly given and as hurriedly withdrawn—the flitting blush upon the cheeks—the thrill which is mutually experienced when the hands accidentally come in contact—the visible quivering of the entire form at such contact —the subdued hushed tone in which words are spoken at one moment, and the suddenly excited warmth with which they are uttered at another, although the words themselves may be merely commonplace,—all these are the signs, and emblems, and soul-waftings of love. But more!—when two beings of kindred dispositions and congenial spirits, and in whose union there appears to be a fitness marked by nature and designated by heaven,—when two such beings meet, although they may give no single one of all those signs of mutual passion, yet is there not such a thing as the soft and mystic transfusion of souls, taking place by some unknown and ineffable agency—a blending of the spirits such as no gross passion can know and no common nature experience,—an interchange of silent whisperings from heart to heart,—the whole passing all human understanding?

If the reader can comprehend all this, he will not be surprised that a being so pure and chaste in thought, so stainless and immaculate in soul, so innocent and unsophisticated in all the artifices of the world—so etherealized, in short, not merely above that patrician sphere to which she belonged, but also above humanity itself,—there is no need for wonder, we repeat, that such a being as Florina Staunton should have fathomed the secret of William Deveril's heart.

But let us continue the thread of our narrative. She had started and she had blushed as he spoke with such sudden warmth; and yet it was a warmth intelligible only to herself, and which would have had nothing significantly perceptible for any common observer had others been present in the room. And Deveril saw that she had started and that she had blushed—saw likewise that her suddenly excited emotions had left a thrilling quivering behind, and that as she took up the camel's-hair pencil in her fair fingers it trembled as if the hand that held it were an aspen-leaf. Then, in the confusion into which his own feelings were suddenly thrown by the incident, he endeavoured to stammer out some excuse, in which attempt his confusion only grew worse confounded.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon—I spoke vehemently——hurriedly——but——but——your ladyship is aware I did not speak disrespectfully——"

"Disrespectfully? Oh, no, Mr. Deveril!" she exclaimed: "I know you are incapable of *that!*"—and as she thus spoke, Florina raised her clear deep blue eyes to her preceptor's countenance.

"I thank your ladyship for that assurance," he said, in the low tremulous tone which indicates feelings proudly moved, and which are almost too full to be restrained,—feelings which while thus threatening to obtain the mastery, appear as if they must burst forth in a gush of passionate and tender avowals to the idol of adoration. "What I meant was that I am at all times ready to devote myself so entirely to your service that every other engagement should be cheerfully put aside."

Florina having again bent her eyes down upon the ivory, was endeavouring to commence laying in some colour: but her hand trembled, and she at once made a serious fault.

"Oh! you have spoilt your picture!" exclaimed Deveril. "Give me the brush—the colour must be removed directly."

But in his eagerness to take the brush from her, their hands came completely in contact, so that Florina's fingers let it fall altogether; and rolling over the ivory it made a number of marks altogether spoiling the design.

"A thousand apologies for my precipitation!" said Deveril, again overwhelmed with confusion, and taking all the blame unto himself.

"It was not your fault," murmured Florina, in a soft melting voice; and unconsciously—mechanically—impulsively, she extended her hand as an assurance that she was not offended.

Deveril took that hand—pressed it—found it linger in his own—and retained it in his clasp. Oh! the ineffable bliss of that moment! Then indeed was there the soft transfusion of spirits warmly blending: then was there an indescribable sense of rapture mutually felt! Deveril was no longer master of himself; and yet it was not with a gross passion that he was intoxicated, but with the purest and holiest love that he was elevated to the realms of elysian bliss. He raised to his lips the hand that still lingered in his own—he kissed it gently, and yet fervently—and then, as if astounded and amazed by his audacity, he sank on his knees at Florina's feet, exclaiming, "Pardon—pardon me!"

He had suddenly relinquished her hand: but she gave it to him again in a hurried and bewildered manner,—murmuring in a broken voice, "Rise, Mr. Deveril—for heaven's sake, rise! If any one should come in, what would be thought?——I who am betrothed to another!"—and suddenly overpowered by this idea she burst into tears.

"Oh, you weep! you weep!" exclaimed Deveril, starting up from his kneeling posture and resuming his chair by her side. "But those words which you have uttered——they prove——they confirm the wildest hopes——Oh, that this may not be a dream!"

"Mr. Deveril, I am unhappy—very, very unhappy, murmured poor Florina, gazing upon him through her tears. "Leave me, forget this moment of weakness on my part——"

"You bid me leave you?" said Deveril, in a mournful voice and with a reproachful look. "What—leave you at a moment when it appeared as if heaven itself were opening above me?"

"Oh, if I could tell you all I wish to say," exclaimed Florina, with more passionate vehemence than she had ever shown in her life before. "It

would relieve my heart! But no—I dare not—I dare not! Leave me!"

"And if I leave you thus, are we ever to meet again?" asked Deveril, profoundly afflicted.

Florina hastily wiped away the tears from her eyes, and bending her looks upon the young man, she was about to put forth all the energies of maiden firmness and tell him that it were indeed better they should part to meet no more, when all that firmness melted rapidly away as she gazed upon the exquisite beauty of Deveril's countenance—a beauty which never had seemed more fascinating to her view than at this moment when every feature expressed love, adoration, sorrow, and despair!

"Mr. Deveril," she said, "I cannot give utterance to what I was about to say; for it was an injunction that would have sealed my unhappiness."

"And mine also, if it were to have bidden me leave you," he immediately rejoined, his countenance lighting up with the animation of hope and bliss. "Say, beautiful lady, has not everything which has just taken place gone too far to be recalled?—have not secrets been revealed which may never be consigned back to oblivion?—and have not two hearts lifted the veil from their innermost sanctuaries? Oh, do not tell me that what is done you could wish to be undone? No—recall not a single gesture, nor a single look. To do so were to prove far more cruel than you are capable of proving: it would have been to lift me on angel-wings high above the common things of earth, merely to plunge me deep down into an abyss of darkness and despair!"

William Deveril had spoken in that tone of mingled rapture, earnestness, hope, and suspense, which was full of love's ineffable but varied music, and can be listened to by no young maiden with impunity: so that even if Florina had been far more solemnly and sacredly pledged by vows of her own to Edmund Saxondale than she was, she would have forgotten all such plight and troth at that instant, because her own feelings were stronger than herself.

"No," she said, murmuringly, as if it were the silvery flow of a crystal streamlet that was wafting soft spirit-voices upon its surface, "I wish to recall nothing—I do not now repent of what has just taken place!"

"Oh, then you love me! you love me!" exclaimed Deveril, in a tone of swelling enthusiasm and gushing rapture; and again and again did he press to his lips the fair hand that was now completely abandoned to him. "But, ah! reflect, Lady Florina!" he said, a cloud suddenly settling upon his countenance: "all the brilliant prospects of your life may be at stake! If you condescend to bestow your hand upon me, you become the bride of the humble and obscure artist——"

"But I become the bride of him whom I can love," observed Florina, in a low soft voice, full of an ineffable sincerity.

"And you will renounce the coronet of Saxondale for me?" asked Deveril, his cheeks glowing with rapture.

"Were it a diadem, I would renounce it for you!" rejoined the patrician maiden.

"Oh! is it possible that such bliss is a reality? can it be otherwise than a dream?" cried Deveril, once more falling upon his knees at the feet of Lady Florina: then as he gazed up into her countenance, he said with a mingled earnestness and impassioned emotion, "If for my sake you consent to sacrifice all those prospects which the world deems brilliant and dazzling,—if for the love of me, the humble and obscure artist, you renounce that position which society considers so desirable, you lay me under an immensity of obligation which only can be repaid by a love so fond, so tender, and so faithful, that never did poet dream of such a love nor novelist depict it! But is this all that I can give in return for the vastness of the sacrifice which you will make for me? Yes—I can offer you no other riches than the wealth of a heart's devotion—the opulence of feelings that shall have no other aim nor endeavour than to ensure your happiness—the treasure of an enthusiastic adoration of which thine image alone shall ever reign the idol! Such, Florina, is all that I can offer you—all that I can lay at your feet—in return for this love of your's."

"And what more can I ask?" said the maiden, in gentle accents and with tender looks, as she bent down towards her kneeling lover, so that her eyes looked into his own, and her balmy breath fanned his brows that were throbbing with the excitement of ineffable feelings. "You offer me everything calculated to ensure my happiness; and the promptings of my heart tell me that if others seek to control my fate by wedding me to splendid misery and coronetted unhappiness, it is a duty I owe unto myself to accept the destiny which a higher power—I mean that of heaven—appears to throw in my way!"

"Oh! every word that you speak, worshipped and adored Florina, convinces me of the depth of your love and assures me of its enduring constancy! This, this is happiness indeed!"—and as Deveril spoke he threw his arm round the snowy neck of the beauteous damsel, and drew down the countenance already so close to his own till their lips met: and as he still knelt at Florina's feet, he thus culled the first kiss of the love which was now so fully revealed.

"Rise, rise," said Florina, with murmuring tremulousness of tone; "rise, William—dearest William!"

He obeyed her—he rose from his kneeling posture—he again seated himself by her side—but for some minutes his heart was too full to allow the utterance of another word. It was a sort of subdued ecstacy—a prolonged sensation of bliss, wherein his soul was steeped: his heart was bathing in a fount of elysian delight. The impression of that pure, chaste kiss was still upon his lips,—the voice which had just addressed him by his Christian name for the first time, was dwelling like a soft strain of delicious music in his ears,—and the image of her on whom he gazed in mute adoration, was reproduced in his heart, never to be effaced! He felt that whatever should betide him in this world, through whatever storms of adversity or tornadoes of misfortune he might be hurried,—to whatever distance circumstances might separate him from the presence of the idolized and adored one,—yet that still the sweets of that kiss would linger on his lips, the music of that voice would continue to float in his ears, and the image of that face of transcending beauty would remain indelibly impressed upon his soul.

On the other hand, while all these thoughts and

sensations were exercising their beatific influence upon William Deveril, Florina was likewise busied with kindred reflections: for she felt that whatever barriers might spring up in the way of her union with him whom she thus loved, that still her love would never be impaired, but if there were a possibility of its increasing, it would acquire fresh power in the presence of every difficulty. Nor less could she avoid contrasting this handsome and elegant young man with the insipid-looking and self sufficient youth to whom her relations sought to sacrifice her. Indeed, carried away by the current of these reflections, she could not help giving audible utterance to them—thereby breaking a long silence, during which she and her lover had sat gazing in mute rapture upon each other.

"I feel that I have been too docile, too obedient," she observed, in a low soft voice. "I have listened with even a servility of which I am now ashamed, and with a meekness wherein was absorbed all the proper spirit of a woman, to the representations of my aunt Lady Macdonald and to the injunctions of my brother Lord Harold. I never ought to have given an affirmative reply to the suit of Lord Saxondale! But while I, on the one hand, was submitting to the control of an aunt and a brother, he on the other hand was acting in accordance with the counsel of his mother: for I now understand it all—this alliance was projected and arranged between the two families, in utter disregard of what my own feelings might be! But, Oh! I am not to be disposed of in this manner; nor will I suffer all the brightest and choicest flowers of my heart's springtime to wither in the sickly atmosphere of society's conventionalisms, nor be crushed beneath the heel of an aunt's or a brother's despotism."

As Florina thus spoke, her beautiful countenance became flushed with excitement—her nostrils dilated—her eyes flashed brightly—her lips curled with decision—and her bosom swelled proudly. Never had she appeared to Deveril's view so truly handsome, so transcendingly lovely, as at this moment when asserting the spirit of a young damsel who felt that she had been coerced, but who had resolved to emancipate herself from the shackles of domestic tyranny.

The reader may rest assured that little progress was made in the drawing lesson of that day: nevertheless William Deveril remained the full two hours which he had at first been invited to stop. Is it necessary to enter into details as to how this interval was passed? or can not the reader picture to himself all the tenderness of that scene which followed the mutual confession of love? There were long periods of silence, during which William and Florina sat together, their hands locked, and their spirits blending in the raptured gaze which they fixed upon each other: then there were intervals of soft and tender discourse, during which vows and pledges were renewed over and over again;—and the time flew away so rapidly that the two hours had passed ere the lovers awoke from their dreamy bliss to the consciousness that time was passing at all.

At length Deveril rose to take his departure. Nothing had been settled as to any future course which they were to pursue: they had been too much absorbed in the happiness of the present moment to be able to give serious attention to the circumstances that might arise from Florina's resolve to renounce the coronet of Saxondale and bestow her hand upon the young artist. But, as in all such cases, there seemed to be a tacit yet mutually adopted understanding that for the present their love should be concealed from all the world—that it should remain a secret sacredly treasured up in the sanctuaries of their own hearts—and that they should trust to the chapter of accidents to throw up circumstances in their favour. Thus ever is it with those who love in opposition to the wishes of relatives and friends; for there is a timidity in love which condemns the heart to keep it secret and forbids the lips to proclaim it boldly, even though the resolve be deeply taken that this shall be the only love that can lead to marriage.

After exchanging a fond embrace William and Florina separated,—the former taking his departure from Lady Macdonald's mansion, and the latter remaing alone to enjoy the luxury of a solitude in which she could ponder upon all that had passed.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGE SCENE.

We have seen that William Deveril had called at Lady Macdonald's mansion precisely at mid-day to give a drawing-lesson to Lady Florina: but we have also seen that it was a lesson in love that was mutually taken, and that two hours had slipped away almost unnoticed by the lovers. It was therefore two o'clock when Mr. Deveril issued from that mansion: and at this hour he ought in pursuance of his engagement to attend at Saxondale House to give lessons to the Hon. Misses Juliana and Constance Farefield. But how could he possibly think of these two ladies when the lovely and beloved Florina filled his heart with her image?

Mechanically however he proceeded towards Park Lane; but as he made his way through the streets, he had no eyes for the ever-flowing tide of that human ocean which pours its unceasing floods through the great thoroughfares of the metropolis; nor had he any ears for those multitudinous sounds which indicate the bustle, the activity, and the vital energies of the modern Babylon. All his powers of vision as well as all his faculties of thought were concentrated inwardly—absorbed in the delicious contemplation of Florina's image which was impressed upon his heart.

In this mood did he reach the vicinage of Saxondale House: but instead of presenting himself there he entered Hyde Park and roved about for some time, abandoning himself to those delicious reflections which naturally sprang from the scene described in the preceding chapter. At length he recollected his engagement at Saxondale House. He looked at his watch: it was half-past three o'clock. What should he do? It was doubtless too late to give the Hon. Misses Farefield their lesson: but would it not appear pre-eminently disrespectful not to call, offer an apology, and ascertain whether it would be their pleasure to take their lesson on the morrow?

Deciding upon this course, William Deveril bent his way to Saxondale House, and was immediately

Florina's own voice,—"William," repeated Lady Saxondale, "tell me, wherefore are you thus moved? why do you listen to me in such deep embarrassment—I might almost say with pain? Is it possible, I once more ask, that you do not comprehend me?"

"No, no," he cried vehemently: "I do not comprehend you. For heaven's sake, explain yourself!"

"Oh! why will you drag from my lips, in the incompetent form of words, those feelings that gush upward from the heart?—for the feelings themselves are full of ardour and passion, but words are cooled by the breath on which they are wafted. But if I must be thus explicit, understand me then at last:"—and after a moment's pause Lady Saxondale added with strong accentuation, "William Deveril, I love you!"

Although from the instant Lady Saxondale had begun this last speech, the young artist was prepared for the avowal just made, yet when it did fall from the lady's lips—and that so abruptly too—he started, and an ejaculation of dismay escaped him. But even then he doubted whether he could have heard aright, or whether his ears had deceived him; and he continued for two or three moments gazing in wonderment and uncertainty upon Lady Saxondale; so that she, with that obtuseness of perception which even the most keen-witted females are liable to in the affairs of the heart, fancied that he was overwhelmed by his good fortune in being beloved by a lady of her rank and wealth.

"Yes, William—dearest William," she said, in the tenderest tone, and fixing upon him looks brimfull of passion, "I love you—I have loved you for some time—and I could conceal it no longer. You know that the world regards me as a woman whose very pride is a guarantee for her virtue: and solemnly, sacredly do I assure you that never before have I stooped from the loftiness of my pedestal to tell any human being that I loved him! But rest assured that I have struggled long to stifle the feeling which thus urges me towards you; and the struggle has been a painful one! I can now struggle no longer: it is a severer conflict than even my proud nature can endure, or my strong will carry on. I bow—I yield—I, who never bent nor succumbed before!——yes, I bow—I yield, to the influence of love;—and you, William Deveril, are the object thereof!"

She had gone on speaking thus because the young artist was so paralysed by the state of his feelings as to be unable to interrupt, much less stop her. Even though her words sounded in his ears, conveying sense and meaning to his comprehension, he could scarcely put faith in what he thus heard; and although he beheld before him that woman of a grand and magnificent beauty, descending from the pedestal of her patrician pride, throwing off the Juno-like stateliness of her demeanour, and melting into all the winning graces and sensuous fascinations of Venus herself, yet still he could scarcely believe in the reality of the spectacle which he thus beheld. So he stood near the chair from which he had risen, with eyes fixed wonderingly upon her countenance—with lips apart—the very effigy of astonishment and doubt!

"William, what means this singularity of manner on your part?" asked Lady Saxondale, her accents now tremulous with anxiety and misgiving. "Are you not pleased with this avowal of love which I have so frankly made? But do not mistake me! It is not as a husband that I seek you—it is not as a wife that I offer myself. No, no—the world must not know our love! And therefore it is as a mistress that I abandon myself to you!——Yes, this tremendous sacrifice of honour, and virtue, and all that a woman should hold most dear, do I make for the maddening passion that I experience for you. O William, do you refuse such a love as this? No, you cannot—you will not! But you do not believe that I am serious? Come—let me convince you that I am—let me press you to my bosom!"

The infatuated lady, hurried along by the maddening fury of her passions, extended her superb arms to enfold the young artist in their embrace: but he started suddenly back—and with a strong recoil that savoured even of horror and aversion, cried out, "No, no!"

"What! you scorn, you spurn my love?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, whose pride and vanity would not at the first instant enable her to think that it was really so, although she expressed it in words. "It is impossible! You still think perhaps that I am trifling with you—that I am trying you in order to see that you are a fit preceptor for my daughters? But I take heaven to witness that I am sincere. What? still you stand gazing upon me thus in consternation and alarm? It is impossible, I repeat, that you can refuse my love. Love? it is a burning, devouring passion,—a passion that maddens me—a passion that scorches me with consuming flames——else never, never had I suffered its wild torrent thus to hurry me away! Love did I say? William Deveril, it is a mad idolatry, in which I could sacrifice almost everything—yes, even the hope of heaven itself, for your sake. Ah! would you have, then, a proof of this fervid love of mine? Behold it in the present scene! You know my pride—you know my haughtiness—and you may conceive then how powerful is that love which can thus bend that pride and subdue that haughtiness to the degree that now makes me sue a humble suppliant for your love in return!"

"Lady Saxondale," answered William Deveril, again retreating suddenly as she once more flew forward to clasp him in her arms, "is it possible that you can have thus far forgotten yourself? or is the excuse to be found in a passing madness?"

"Yes, yes—it is madness!" she exclaimed with vehement accents,—"the madness of this love which I feel for you! And I have asked you to love me in return—and you hesitate? Oh, but you *shall* love me—you *must* love me—and love too as I do—as passionately, as ardently!"

"Peace, madam!" exclaimed Deveril indignantly. "This scene must not be prolonged another minute."

All on a sudden Lady Saxondale's whole being appeared to change: the crimson hue of excitement vanished from her cheeks, leaving them pale as marble—the sensuous light which had been beaming in her eyes, flamed up into flashing fires—the supplicating attitude of her splendid figure was succeeded by an air of Juno-like wrath, as she drew herself up to the full of her commanding height; and in a voice choked with rage, she said, "Ah! then you scorn my love? you spurn me? you have dared to humiliate Lady Saxondale?"

"Madam," replied Deveril, "if I remain here

even during the few brief moments which are occupied by what I am now saying, it is only because I would not wish you to imagine that I shall go hence from your abode to give publicity to a scene as unexpected as it was painful. Your ladyship speaks of being humiliated: but if you feel so, it need only be so long as I am in your presence. No—I will not make a vaunt of the proposals which in a mood of deplorable weakness you have ventured to make to me. Let the veil of oblivion be dropped over what has passed! And now I bid your ladyship farewell."

"Stop—one moment stop!" said Lady Saxondale, in the deep hoarse voice of concentrated passion; and she clutched Deveril violently by the arm. "You must not leave me thus. I feel like a desperate woman, capable of desperate deeds. You, sir, are the only man I ever loved; and to have this first love of mine thus rejected—thus spurned——No, by heaven, it shall not be!"—and in the madness of her rage she stamped her foot violently on the carpet.

Deveril, shocked and horrified at what was taking place, burst from the strong grasp in which Lady Saxondale held him, and was hastening to the door, when she bounded after him, and caught him by the arm again, crying, "Stop—I command you to stop! Beware how you irritate me—I am not mistress of my actions—and if you attempt to escape from me again, ere I have said all that I have to say, there will be a struggle, and you know it will be playing a coward's part to do violence to a woman!"

"Lady Saxondale," said the young artist, painfully excited and scarcely knowing how to act, "I will remain a few minutes and listen to what you have to say, if you will only tranquillize your feelings: for I really do not wish that you should incur the chance of exposure before your household. At the same time I warn your ladyship not to address me again in language that is derogatory to yourself and insulting to me."

"Insulting to you, foolish boy?" said Lady Saxondale: and the words came hissing forth on her panting breath, while every feature of her handsome countenance was convulsed with passion—a passion in which the fury of desire was mingled with the rage of disappointment and the deep sense of mortification. "Have you refused my love because there is such disparity in our ages? It is true that there are many years' difference between us: but am I not handsome? am I not in the proud glory of my beauty? Look at this hair;—is there one line of silver in it? Look at this face;—is there a wrinkle upon it? Look at this form;—has time done aught to mar its symmetry? No, no," she added with increasing excitement, "I not only love, but I have the consciousness of being loveable. And if my mirror told me false in that respect, think you that the handsomest and proudest peers of England, who when seeking my hand have told me that I was beautiful, have spoken thus in mere idle flattery? Once again, then, William Deveril——"

"No, lady—not again—not even *once* again!" he cried, now stricken with the conviction that every moment which he gave up to a prolongation of this scene was a treachery and an insult to that sweet patrician girl who but a few hours previously had breathed a revelation of purest and chastest love in his ear.

"Ah, then your's is a heart of adamant and will not be moved!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "But perhaps you love another?"—and her whole form quivered with rage as the bare idea struck her with an ice-chill, smiting her proud heart as if it would rend it in twain.

"Love another?" echoed the young artist mechanically: for again he trembled lest his secret should be surprised.

"Yes—love another!" promptly rejoined Lady Saxondale. "I said so—and I see that it is the case. Oh! that tell-tale look of your's reveals the secret! Then I have a rival? Ah! rivalry encourages bad passions—it excites vengeance—and by the heaven above us, William Deveril, if my love be spurned for that of any puling sentimental girl, the revenge that I will wreak shall be terrible!"

"Good heavens, Lady Saxondale!" exclaimed the young artist, thinking of Florina; "you know not what you say!"

"But I have told you what I will do," responded the infuriate woman—for infuriate she now really was. "Beware how you continue to spurn my love! Say but one kind word, and I will forgive all that has passed——"

"Madam, I can bear this no longer," cried Deveril, once more breaking away from her.

"Stop!" she exclaimed, a third time catching him by the arm, and with such power too that he could not have escaped without exerting more violence than his generous nature would permit him to do towards a female: "I have but a single word now to say. Give me your love, William, and I will worship you: persist in refusing me, and I become your bitterest enemy!"

Having thus spoken, with flashing eyes, pale countenance, quivering lips, and trembling form, she suddenly released him of her own accord—and he found himself free.

"Lady Saxondale," he answered, "when this tempest of passion has subsided, you will be sorry for what has passed."

"Sorry? No," she cried, now drawing herself up once more with sovereign hauteur, so that her majestic beauty seemed terrible in this storm of rage and indignation: "that word is not one which can be applied to Lady Saxondale. Instead of experiencing sorrow, I shall look for vengeance. If *your* mind be made up, *mine* is also. I could have sacrificed everything to enjoy your love; but I cannot endure to be humiliated by this rejection of my own. Much therefore as I could have loved you, I am prepared to hate you. Which is to be the alternative?"

"Madam," answered Deveril, "this scene has already lasted much too long, and your conduct towards me has passed from indelicacy to insult."

"Begone, then, sir!" she exclaimed, the fires of all possible human passions flashing from her eyes. "I hate you—and I will be revenged!"

William Deveril bowed coldly and quitted the room. In a couple of minutes he crossed the threshold of Saxondale House, and returned once more into Hyde Park to compose the feelings that had been so much excited by the strange and painful ordeal through which he had just passed.

It appeared as if he had just wakened up from a

dream the influence of which pursued him even when he was awake. Was it possible that the proud, the dignified, the haughty Lady Saxondale had so far forgotten her wonted self-possession as to expose herself in such a manner? But by a natural transition of ideas, the young artist was led to contrast the sensuous fervour and immodest passion of that lady with the chaste love and delicate affection of the beauteous Florina. Then, still pursuing the thread of his reflections, he could not help trembling at the satanic threats of vengeance which Lady Saxondale had hurled at his head,—and not at his head alone, but at that of whomsoever she might detect in being what she chose to regard as a rival. Deveril saw that she was a desperate and dangerous woman—a woman whom her disappointed passion had rendered thus desperate, and who was likely to prove all the more dangerous because she possessed the strongest energies, which she would not fail to exercise in the pursuit of any object she was anxious to attain.

But what was he to do? Should he confidentially impart to Florina's ear everything that had occurred, and thus put the young maiden upon her guard in case Lady Saxondale should by any accident discover that the object of his love was none other than the same being who had been selected to become her own son's bride? No—the honourable and upright mind of Deveril recoiled from the bare idea of shocking the pure and chaste Florina by the tale of her ladyship's depravity; and he therefore came to the resolve to observe the strictest secrecy in respect to all that had just taken place.

It was now five o'clock; and Deveril, quitting Hyde Park, bent his way to a lodging which he had in Pall Mall. Not that he habitually resided there; for he had another place of residence in one of the suburbs of London. But this lodging, consisting of three apartments, served as the place where he received letters and visits in respect to the profession he exercised. One of the rooms was fitted up as a *studio*, where he gave lessons to those who preferred to visit him there: another room was used as a parlour; and a third as a bed-chamber, in case it suited him to sleep at his lodgings.

On returning to Pall Mall he found two or three persons waiting to see him on matters of business; and when they had taken their departure he ordered some dinner to be served up. Little appetite however had the young artist for the food thus placed upon the table: his thoughts were too much absorbed—or rather too pleasurably and painfully divided between the two scenes which had marked this memorable day. It was not till past nine o'clock that he quitted his lodging; and the evening being exceedingly beautiful, he determined to walk to his suburban residence—for he felt that exercise and fresh air would soothe the excitement of his thoughts.

It was ten o'clock as William Deveril entered the Regent's Park, across which his path lay in the direction of a splendid mansion somewhat isolated from the rest of the superb residences which abound in that district. The evening was warm—some of the casements of that mansion were open—and the swelling tide of music flowed forth to his ear. That music was accompanied by several sweet female voices; and so exquisitely did they sing that the young artist, as passionately fond of music as he was of drawing, stood still to listen. He was enabled to approach to within half-a-dozen yards of the fence bounding the garden in which the mansion stood; and it was from the open casement of a room on the first floor that the delicious strains of vocal and instrumental harmony were wafted forth. This casement was the side-window of a drawing-room whose front, with a range of several windows, looked in another direction upon an ampler spread of grounds; and the side-window to which we have alluded, opened on a balcony towards which the luxuriant clematis and jasmine, mingling with roses, crept up against the wall.

As William Deveril stood listening to the music, he recollected that Florina had mentioned to him during the two hours they had passed together that day, that she was going to a party with her aunt Lady Macdonald to the house of some friends in the Regent's Park that evening; and as the young artist stood gazing up at the open casement, the crimson draperies of which gave a roseate hue to the light shining forth from the interior of the room, he thought to himself, "Perhaps it is here that my beloved Florina is now gracing the brilliant assemblage with her presence? Ah! was it some instinctive feeling of this kind which made me prefer walking home to-night—which made me take this exact path—and which now caused me to halt here close by this stately mansion?"

While he was thus musing to himself, the harmony had ceased—the soft sounds of the music and the equally delicious voices no longer sent forth their fluid notes to the star-lit air; and Deveril was about to pursue his way, scarcely able to repress a sigh as he thought that if Florina were indeed there, some aristocratic coxcomb perchance was privileged to lead her through the mazes of the dance, while he who possessed her love was wandering round the exterior of that luxurious mansion!

At the very moment he was turning away, the crimson drapery was drawn aside, and a lady appeared upon the balcony, as if to escape for a few moments from the stifling heat within and breathe the fresher and purer air of the night. But that lady was Florina! Yes—Florina, elegantly dressed—looking radiantly beautiful in her ball-room toilet—Florina, the idol of the young artist's worship!

An ejaculation of joy and delight burst from Deveril's lips. Florina started, and was about to retreat from the balcony; but Deveril breathed her name in a soft voice, yet just loud enough for her to hear. And she did hear it—and by the light which shone through the crimson draperies the enraptured Deveril could perceive that the young maiden's countenance became suddenly animated with ineffable pleasure as she recognized him. But it was dangerous to attempt any communication under circumstances where notice might be attracted; and so the interchange of whatever the lovers might have to say was limited to signs. Florina waved her snowy handkerchief to the young artist; and he, responding in a similar manner to that mute but recognized signal of love, passed lingeringly away.

He saw Florina push aside the draperies again and disappear behind them: then rejoicing that he had thus caught a glimpse of his adored one, though only for such a brief passing instant, he sped

onward with a lighter heart to his own residence, which was at no very great distance.

But as William Deveril entered the hall of a beautiful little villa which he thus occupied in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, a charming creature of angelic beauty came forth from the parlour to welcome him, and even to chide him affectionately for being so late. Who was this beautiful creature that thus showed herself so anxious for his return, and whom he embraced so fondly as he made some excuse for his lateness? Ah! from this mystery we cannot at present draw the veil—even though it were to relieve the reader from uncertainty as to whether William Deveril had that day pledged an undivided love to Florina Staunton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FABRICATION.

NOTHING could exceed the rage and disappointment of Lady Saxondale at the rebuff she had experienced from William Deveril. We must inform the reader that from the very first moment he commenced giving lessons to the Miss Farefields, at Saxondale House, several months back, her ladyship had conceived a strange and irresistible attachment towards that handsome young man. At the beginning Lady Saxondale had endeavoured to put away this feeling, with as much calm confidence that she would succeed in doing so as if she were divesting herself of a garment which though fitting somewhat tight she had no doubt of being able to lay aside: but insensibly that attachment grew upon her; and though she was long ere she would admit this circumstance to herself, yet she could not help at last opening her eyes deliberately to the fact that she really loved William Deveril.

It was perfectly true that Lady Saxondale struggled long and painfully against this growing passion: true also that it acquired a power greater than her own faculty of resistance. We may likewise observe that she had spoken with equal truth when informing Deveril that she had never loved before. The reader is well aware that she had not married old Lord Saxondale for love; and that though she had been true and faithful to him—had treated him with kindness—and had therefore made him a good wife, she had never experienced for him any sentiment beyond those of friendship and gratitude. At his death, though left a young, beautiful, and rich widow, she had never thought of changing her condition—simply because out of the many offers which she received, not one was made by any individual of a rank so much superior to her own as to make her wish to aspire to it. As for love, she encountered no one capable of inspiring her with that sentiment. Thus remaining single, she had pursued only one idea—and this was her ambition. She looked upon herself with pride and satisfaction as having been the means of perpetuating the race of Saxondale in a direct line from her husband, and in having rescued the coronet and estates from the grasp of a profligate and unprincipled man in the person of Ralph Farefield. Her ambition had therefore been, from the time of her husband's death, to rear Edmund Saxondale—to watch over him with the most zealous care—and to cherish him as the only prop upon which the proud title of Saxondale now rested. For there was no other direct male heir to that title known to exist; and if Edmund died, the title would become extinct and the estates would devolve to a very distant relative owning a ducal rank, and in which the title of Saxondale would consequently be merged and lost. We will not now pause to describe all Lady Saxondale had suffered on perceiving the gradual development of Edmund's evil qualities as he grew up: but we will content ourselves with observing that if she could not love him, she nevertheless cherished him as the only hope of perpetuating the family into which she had married and of which she was so proud.

This was Lady Saxondale's ambition! The same explanations may likewise account for her apparently premature anxiety to make such matrimonial arrangements on behalf of Edmund, as would provide him with a wife the moment he should come of age. Hence the selection of Lady Florina,—a highborn though portionless damsel, whose relations and friends had been too willing to assent to her prospective sacrifice to the sickly, ill-conditioned, and evil-minded Lord Saxondale. It was now the aim of her ladyship's ambition to see Edmund married and behold male issue springing from the union, so that she might be assured of the perpetuation of the race of Saxondale. With this ambition constituting as it were the aim of her existence, it was not likely that such a woman would be easily accessible to the more tender sentiment of love. She was too worldly-minded to be thus sensitive. But had she not passions? Yes: but she had also the pride that enabled her to control them. She had not remained virtuous for the love of virtue: but because she was too prudent and too cautious to endanger her proud position in the world. She had not remained chaste through any genuine sentiment of feminine purity; but because she did not choose to risk the consequences of an intrigue. Thus, when she had found her passions rebelling, she had subdued them; and when tempted by the overtures of the gallant and the dissipated in the world of fashion, she had risen superior to such temptations—not because she possessed a virtue that recoiled from them, but because she was too proud to compromise herself by succumbing to them.

Such had been the history of Lady Saxondale's life from the period of her husband's death until that when she met William Deveril. For nineteen years had she remained inaccessible to love or to temptation: and now she not only experienced love, but invited temptation by becoming herself the temptress! Severely and painfully, we repeat, had she struggled against this passion which she felt for Deveril: but at length she found that it was consuming her. She had endeavoured to avoid meeting him when he came to the house to give lessons to her daughters; but an irresistible impulse would urge her to the room where she might see him. She had struggled to banish his image from her mind: as vainly might she have essayed to roll back with her hand the mighty volume of water which the Thames pours into the sea at the time of its ebb. The strength of her mind gradually gave way in this one respect: namely, the irresistible passion she experienced for Deveril. She felt at last that she must avow this love of her's to him—if such a passion deserved the name of *love* at all;

Not for a moment did she anticipate a repulse. On the contrary, naturally judging from what she constantly beheld passing around her in the great world, she had expected that the humble artist would rejoice at being invited to become the paramour of a lady of rank and riches.

Great, then, was her rage—infinite her disappointment—and cruel her sense of humiliation, at the rebuff she had experienced. That it was through any purely virtuous feeling on William Deveril's part, she could scarcely imagine: but she believed it to be because he loved another, and was so infatuated with this love, that unlike the young men of the aristocratic world, he would have considered it a crime to prove unfaithful to it. Whosoever therefore the object of this love might be, Lady Saxondale was fully prepared to regard and to treat her as a rival; and thus was this woman, naturally so proud, so strong-minded, and so dignified in her conduct, ready to descend to the meanness of jealousy, the paltriness of envy, and the pettiness of revenge, in a matter where after all she herself had sustained no substantial nor real injury. But where a woman's passion is concerned, her whole nature becomes warped according to circumstances and influences.

Ungenerous herself in the course which she was thus prepared to pursue, Lady Saxondale could not help fancying that Deveril was equally likely to take an ungenerous advantage of the scene which had placed her in his power. In short, she believed that he was likely, in consequence of her threats, to spread the story of her overtures and his refusal. At all events, she argued, if he did not do so at once he would hereafter when he found that she had given utterance to no idle threats but was pursuing him and her rival whoever she might be, with her implacable resentment. Therefore she resolved to be beforehand with him in all respects, and by telling the story herself, put upon it the complexion that would suit her own interests, and throw complete discredit on any counter-statement he might hereafter make.

So soon as William Deveril had parted from Lady Saxondale in the manner described in the previous chapter, she promptly composed her feelings; and ringing the bell, inquired whether her daughters had returned from their ride in the carriage. She was answered in the negative; and she therefore waited patiently till they came back. On their arrival the young ladies, hearing that their mother had inquired for them, hastened to put off their bonnets and shawls, and then proceeded to the drawing-room where her ladyship was now seated.

"My dear girls," she said, in a far more caressing and lively manner than she was wont to adopt towards them, especially in respect to the eldest, Juliana,—"you will never conjecture how singular a scene has been taking place during your absence."

"At all events, my dear mother," answered Constance, "it was of no very serious character; for you are gay over it: and therefore your words have caused me little uneasiness but much curiosity."

"The scene was too ludicrous to be serious," continued Lady Saxondale. "What will you think when I tell you that I have had a declaration of love and an offer of marriage?"

"What! you, mother?" exclaimed Juliana. "From some old nobleman, I suppose?"

"The remark is scarcely respectful, Miss," returned Lady Saxondale, now suddenly recovering her wonted dignity, blended with hauteur: "for I presume you intended me to understand that only an old nobleman would be likely to seek my hand in marriage."

"Well, tell us this adventure of your's then," said Juliana, not in the most respectful tone: for the reader has already seen that this young lady was by no means the pattern of a dutiful daughter.

"Yes—tell us what has happened, my dear mother?" asked Constance, who was far more affectionate and docile to her parent.

"It is perfectly true," continued Lady Saxondale, addressing herself more to Constance than to Juliana, "that I have received an offer: but I think when I tell you from whom it came, you will say that I have even less reason to be proud of the proposal than if it had been made by some old nobleman such as Juliana has referred to."

"Who, then, was it?" inquired Constance.

"Your preceptor, Mr. Deveril!" responded Lady Saxondale.

An ejaculation of the most unfeigned surprise burst from the lips both of Juliana and Constance.

"It is really the case," continued their mother. "You know that you waited for him some little time this afternoon; and as he did not make his appearance you went out. But you left a message that if he called he was to be asked to come to-morrow. Now, as I always regarded him as a very civil, well-behaved, nice young man, I did not choose to mortify him by leaving that message to be delivered by the servants: so I allowed him to be shown up when he came; and having received his apology for the lateness of his arrival, I gave your message. I don't know if I spoke in a more affable tone than usual; but certain it is that he sat down and began conversing in a way which I considered to be somewhat familiar. I showed a little impatience at this; when he suddenly entered upon the most extravagant declarations——I scarcely know how he began them, but I recollect that I was so taken with astonishment that I allowed him to proceed uninteruptedly for some time. To be brief, he flung himself at my feet—gave utterance to a thousand ridiculous things borrowed from the rhapsodies which lovers are made to utter in novels and romances—besought me to have pity on him—and vowed if I did not, he should kill himself in despair."

"Is this possible?" asked Juliana, eyeing her mother with something like doubt and suspicion in her looks.

"Good heavens, what insolence!" cried the younger daughter, who on the other hand implicitly believed every word her ladyship uttered.

"Insolence indeed!" echoed Lady Saxondale, not appearing to observe the manner in which Juliana surveyed her: "and yet I can scarcely call it insolence, because it was such pure unmitigated folly. However, I sent him away from my presence, and ordered him never to come to the house again."

"I am surprised at Mr. Deveril," said Constance. "I always thought he was an unassuming, well-behaved, and discreet young man,—a very superior young man indeed—quite a gentleman——"

"And utterly incapable of such egregious folly," added Juliana. "At least," she immediately said, observing that Lady Saxondale fixed her eyes sternly upon her, "he is the last man in existence that I should have thought likely to commit himself so absurdly. The only excuse to be found for him is that it was a transient touch of insanity."

"Perhaps so," observed Lady Saxondale.

She then continued to discourse upon the subject with her two daughters a little longer; after which she retired to her own chamber to dress for dinner. But she had now a new cause for spite and vexation, she having seen full well that she was not believed by her eldest daughter.

"Well, Constance," said this young lady to her sister, the moment they were alone together, "what think you of the tale that has just been told us?"

"That Mr. Deveril's conduct was most extraordinary," replied Constance, not perceiving the real drift of her sister's question.

"And so it would have been if everything took place exactly as our mother has chosen to represent it," observed Juliana.

"What do you mean?" asked Constance, in astonishment.

"I mean that there is something more in all this than her ladyship has chosen to tell us. Is it likely—is it natural, that a young man like Mr. Deveril would fall so desperately in love with a woman of our mother's age?"

"Not so very old," interrupted Constance: "only just forty—and you must admit that mamma is superbly handsome."

"Granted! But if she is forty, Mr. Deveril is not more than twenty," rejoined Juliana; "and it is not likely, I repeat, that he should fall head over ears in love with a woman double his age: for it could only be in the madness and intoxication of such a love that he would have ventured to demand our mother's hand in marriage. In plain terms, Constance, I do not believe the story; and we will find out something more about it ere long."

"But why should mamma tell so wicked a falsehood?" asked the younger sister, reproachfully.

"Oh! why, why, why—you always ask why to everything!" exclaimed Juliana, petulantly. "Of course one may see things or suspect things, and yet not always know the reason why. How is it that our mother is so desperately frightened of that old wretch Mabel, whom I hate as cordially as possible? How is it, again, that our mother gave an audience in such a hurry to that old woman the other night that I told you about——"

At this moment a lady's-maid entered to intimate that it was time to dress for dinner; and the colloquy between the two sisters was accordingly cut short.

Little did Lady Saxondale sleep during the night that followed this day of her discomfiture and defeat in respect to William Deveril. She lay tossing upon her downy couch as if it were the hardest and most uncomfortable mattrass that ever belonged to a pauper's garret. Or we might even go farther and say that many a poor creature that night slept a sweeter sleep upon straw than the great patrician lady was enabled to woo to her eyes though lying in that sumptuous bed. Her heart felt as if scorpions were tearing it: for though she had declared that she could hate Deveril as keenly as she had loved him—and though she was even meditating revenge—yet was she still devoured by a consuming passion for that splendidly handsome young man. And she was tortured, too, with jealousy on account of the unknown rival to whom she felt assured his heartwas devoted, and whom she longed to punish!

When morning dawned Lady Saxondale arose from the sumptuous couch where she had only been enabled to snatch a few hours of troubled slumber—a slumber too which was haunted with feverish dreams. She looked at herself in the glass; and perceiving that she was pale and somewhat careworn, she stamped her foot impatiently, muttering to herself, "New cares, new sources of annoyance and vexation, arising up around me! This must not be."

And yet she did not put a stop to any of these self-created sources of vexation by at once abandoning her projects of vengeance in respect to William Deveril. No; the strong-minded woman was now enslaved by her passions—those passions which for so many long years she had dominated as an empress-tyrant keeps her foot upon the neck of a rebellious people.

It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon that Lady Saxondale's carriage stopped at the house of Lady Macdonald in Cavendish Square: and as she ascended towards the drawing-room, she settled her countenance in such a manner that it seemed to wear a look as if a sense of some ludicrous yet disagreeable scene were lingering in the mind. Lady Macdonald and Florina were seated together in the drawing-room when Lady Saxondale was announced; and they both at once observed the singular look which her ladyship's features thus wore.

"Has anything unpleasant occurred, my dear friend?" asked Lady Macdonald when the usual greetings and complimentary inquiries were exchanged.

"Unpleasant?" echoed Lady Saxondale, as if surprised that she should be thus questioned. "Oh! I suppose that my looks must have reflected somewhat of the topic I was revolving in my mind as I rode hither. Well, I did not mean to tell you—but after all, I do not know why I should keep it secret:"—and her ladyship now laughed with every appearance of a genuine merriment.

"At all events it is nothing seriously unpleasant," said Lady Macdonald.

"Rather ludicrous and amusing than unpleasant," responded Lady Saxondale. "And yet it is annoying too—because," she added with dignity, "I flatter myself that there could not possibly be anything in my manner, much less in my conduct, to give the slightest encouragement——"

"My dear friend, you are speaking in enigmas," said Lady Macdonald, as Lady Saxondale paused. "Neither Florina nor I can understand to what you are alluding. And yet in the sphere in which we move, people do seem to be growing mysterious and incomprehensible. Here's my niece, who has been so abstracted and thoughtful all the morning——"

"By the bye, my dear Florina," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as if suddenly reminded of something by the aunt's allusion to the young lady, "now that

I think of it, you receive lessons from a certain Mr. William Deveril—do you not?"

The sudden appearance of a ghost would not have produced a more startling effect upon the lovely Florina than this question so abruptly and unexpectedly put. She turned red and pale in rapid transitions—half sprang from her seat—and then surveyed Lady Saxondale in a sort of stupor of amazement.

"Why, what is the matter with you, Flo?" asked her ladyship, at first utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this emotion which her words had excited on the part of the young lady; then all in an instant a suspicion of the truth flashed to her mind—for the eyes of jealousy are keen and sharp as needles.

"You changed the conversation so abruptly, my dear Lady Saxondale," answered Florina, slowly recovering herself and endeavouring to smile, though the attempt was not very successful, "that you quite startled me."

"I too noticed how strange you looked, Flo," exclaimed Lady Macdonald: "but I suppose that when one is abstracted and thoughtful, to have a

question suddenly put shakes the nerves. However, Lady Saxondale has evidently something to say concerning that Mr. Deveril who gives you lessons, Flo."

"The most amusing thing in the world!" exclaimed her ladyship, pretending rather to address herself to the aunt than to the niece, but furtively surveying the latter with a scrutinizing intentness from the corners of her eyes. "Would you believe it?—this Mr. Deveril who has obtained such renown by his talents and is so extensively patronized in the circles of rank and fashion, seems to have had his head turned by his good fortune. For my part, I always considered him to be a well-behaved unassuming young man, of a sufficiently independent spirit for one of his sex and intelligence, but totally devoid of any insolent pretensions."

"That is precisely the opinion which I had formed of him," observed Lady Macdonald; "and I should really feel grieved to be compelled to alter it. What has happened?"

Florina said nothing, but awaited with a torturing suspense the reply that should be given to the question her aunt had just put to Lady Saxondale. She was naturally filled with the strangest misgivings; and even while waiting for the clearing up of her uncertainty and doubt, she felt a thousand wild conjectures sweeping through her brain; for under such painful circumstances one seems to live an entire age in a single minute, and to be tossed upon a sea of troubled emotions vast enough to fill a century, although compressed at the time into the space of a few instants. She however did her best to conceal what she experienced. Her aunt was not noticing her; nor did Lady Saxondale appear to be doing so either—though in reality the latter lost not a single gleam or shade of those feelings that found a swift brief flitting expression upon the young maiden's features.

"You asked me what has happened, my dear friend?" resumed Lady Saxondale in reply to Lady Macdonald's question. "You really never would guess—and you will scarcely know how to believe me when I tell you. In one sense you will perhaps say that I ought to feel complimented—in another indignant and angry—and in a third sense wonderfully amused and diverted."

"I already begin to understand your meaning," said Lady Macdonald in astonishment. "But is it really possible——"

"So possible," returned Lady Saxondale, "that it did actually take place."

All this was torture and excruciation for poor Florina; and Lady Saxondale saw it. Every varied expression which swept over the young maiden's countenance, and every new effort which she made to conceal her emotions, tended to confirm Lady Saxondale's suspicion that she now knew who her rival was in the love of William Deveril. Therefore, to deal in bare allusions without coming immediately to the point itself, was now a source of malignant pleasure to the jealous lady. She saw how she was torturing poor Florina—how she was angling as it were with her feelings—and she endeavoured to prolong this cruel game as much as possible.

"Yes, my dear friend," she continued, still appearing to address herself almost entirely to Lady Macdonald, "what you in your shrewdness have already conjectured did really take place. You may conceive my astonishment! But who would have thought it of this Mr. Deveril? A young man of his intelligence to be so besotted!—a person of his apparent good breeding to be so utterly ignorant of the ordinary proprieties of life, or at least so far to forget them! Is it not strange?"

"Very strange indeed," returned Lady Macdonald. "And yet persons in our sphere of life are liable to the impertinences of presumptuous coxcombs——"

"That is exactly what Mr. Deveril is," observed Lady Saxondale: and she saw that poor Florina was literally writhing on her chair under these cruel inflictions. "The poor silly fool, because he is rather good-looking, has got some little talent, and has been petted and made much of in the houses of the aristocracy to which he has obtained admittance as a preceptor, fancies that the civilities shown him are of a different character from what they seem——"

"But you have not yet told us," interrupted Lady Macdonald, "exactly what it is that this Mr. Deveril has done: although, from the remarks you have made, I have not much trouble to guess. In short, I suppose that he has dared to fancy that your ladyship was in love with him?"

"Precisely so," returned Lady Saxondale, who now had the secret satisfaction of noticing with her furtive glances that poor Florina was so cruelly tortured as to have been compelled surreptitiously to wipe away the tears which had started from her eyes. "The incident happened yesterday," continued Lady Saxondale, dwelling with a fiendish delight upon her words as she knew that every syllable fell like successive drops of molten lead upon the most sensitive fibres of Florina's heart. "The girls had gone out for an airing, and I was alone. Mr. Deveril was shown up, because I had a message to deliver from Juliana and Constance. It was merely, as you might suppose, to make arrangements for the days and the hours when they would take their lessons in future. It struck me that there was something very peculiar in the young man's look and manner,—a flushing of the cheeks—a trembling and a hesitation in the speech—an embarrassment and an awkwardness, as if he wanted to say something but dared not. It naturally occurred to me that he had some favour to ask,—perhaps an advance of money, or something of the kind; and feeling really willing to oblige him, but little suspecting what was agitating in his mind, I said something to encourage him to proceed. Then he burst forth into the most impassioned declarations. I listened with astonishment, thinking that he had either gone mad or was reciting some rhapsody from a novel. But as his language grew more vehement and his meaning less and less mistakable, I rose indignantly from my seat. Then he threw himself upon his knees before me, vowing that his happiness—his very life—was in my hands, and that if I did not have mercy upon him he should kill himself in despair."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Lady Macdonald. "And to think that I should have allowed such an improper person to give lessons to Florina, and to be alone with her!"

"But I had done the same in respect to my daughters, without ever thinking that the young

man was capable of so much infatuation or arrogance, whichever it may be. And yet," continued Lady Saxondale, affecting to laugh gaily, "I really ought to consider myself highly complimented at being thus chosen as the object of his tenderness, when amongst his pupils there were younger and fairer ladies. Really, Flo," she added, now turning towards the soul-tortured maiden, "I am surprised that in his impudence and presumption he has never thrown himself at your feet."

Florina was indeed suffering a martyrdom which was all the more acute—all the more intense—because she dared not give vent to the expression of her agonies in ejaculations or in tears, but was compelled to strain every nerve and exert every effort to conceal them. The colour had however entirely forsaken her cheeks—she looked unnaturally pale and cold—and the smile which she forced herself to assume at Lady Saxondale's remark, was wan and sickly.

"But how did this extraordinary romance end?" asked Lady Macdonald, who not dreaming that her niece had any extraordinary interest in the conversation, did not pay particular attention to her.

"It terminated, my dear friend," answered Lady Saxondale, "in the only way in which such a proceeding could end. With indignation did I expel Mr. Deveril from my presence, commanding him never to approach the door of Saxondale House again. He went away, muttering threats of revenge, but terribly crest-fallen. Now really, I do not wish to inflict an injury upon the poor infatuated, presumptuous young man: but of course I cannot, by passing the matter over in silence, permit him to continue his visits at the houses of my friends."

"I for one shall order the door to be shut in his face next time he comes hither," exclaimed Lady Macdonald; "and I am sure that our dear Florina is as much obliged as I am to your ladyship for having thus lost no time in making us aware of the dangerous character of this young man. And so he threatened you, my dear friend—did he?"

"Yes: but that is always the last resource of vulgar minds," responded Lady Saxondale. "You may readily suppose I cared nothing for his threats——"

"Certainly not," rejoined Lady Macdonald. "Persons in our sphere are beyond the reach of such malevolence. Probably you will have a letter full of contrition in the course of the day."

"Ah! I forgot to observe," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching at a remark which thus afforded her a hint for another well-seeming falsehood, "that he sent one this morning; but as a matter of course I returned it unopened. And now I must say farewell—for I have got a round of visits to pay."

"And of course you will not forget to put all your friends on their guard against this young man?" said Lady Macdonald.

"It is my duty; and though really a painful one, I shall fulfil it. Good bye, my dear friend. Good bye, dear Flo."

Then, with every appearance of the most affectionate cordiality, did Lady Saxondale press the hand of the young maiden into whose heart she had been planting daggers for a whole half-hour; and without seeming to notice that her unfortunate victim deeply and keenly felt the wounds thus inflicted, her ladyship passed with her wonted mien of graceful dignity out of the room. Florina sought the shade of a window-recess, as if to observe her ladyship take her departure in her splendid equipage, but in reality to conceal the tears which were now gushing forth from her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SISTERS.

In the mean time a scene of some interest was passing at Saxondale House. Juliana and Constance were seated together in an apartment specially devoted to their own use, and where they were wont to practise their music, skim the fashionable novels of the day, and receive their lessons in painting from William Deveril.

We have already stated that Juliana was a perfect likeness of her mother, possessing the same aquiline profile, with its aristocratic haughtiness of expression subdued not so much by a natural feminine softness as by a melting sensuousness of look. A keen observer, well skilled in the reading of the human physiognomy, could not have failed to observe that Juliana was a young woman of strong passions—the evidence of which might be read in her eyes, the dewy moisture of her lips, and the voluptuous contours of her form. Being in her twenty-third year, the reader may perhaps wonder, —especially as she was so exceedingly handsome,— that she had remained unmarried. Assuredly it was through no fault of her own, nor that of her mother: for Lady Saxondale, without actually condescending to any of those vulgar manœuvres to which match-making parents have recourse to secure husbands for their daughters, had done her best to "get off," as the term is, both Juliana and Constance. Juliana too had endeavoured to win more than one heart; but somehow or another she had never received an offer which was deemed eligible enough to be accepted. Perhaps it was that she had no fortune of her own: or perhaps, despite her fine person, she was not one of those really loveable beings by whom a man was likely to be captivated. Certain it is that at this age when girlhood had completely expanded into womanhood, the Hon. Miss Farefield was still unmarried. But did she love? was there an image constantly uppermost in her heart, and upon which she dwelt day and night? The reader has already received more than one hint to that effect; and in this chapter he will hear still farther upon the subject.

But first let us say a word or two with regard to Constance. She was altogether of a different style of beauty from her sister, save in respect to the well developed proportions of her figure: but she had light hair, a very fair complexion, and soft blue eyes—while Juliana's hair was of raven darkness, her eyes were black and brilliant, and her complexion was of a clear delicate olive. Juliana possessed sentiments more refined and feelings more ethereal than her sister: the same strong passions did not agitate in her soul—and the love of which she was susceptible, may be described as of a far

purer and chaster kind than that which could alone occupy the heart of the elder young lady.

While their mother was paying her visit to Lady Macdonald, Juliana and Constance, each dressed in an elegant *negligée*, were seated together, as already described, in the apartment where their mornings were generally passed: for although it was now really the afternoon so far as the proper divisions of time went, yet it is always *morning* in the fashionable world until the dinner-hour, even though this should be as late as six or seven o'clock. The two sisters had been conversing on the incident of the previous day: namely, the story which their mother had told them relative to William Deveril; and by a not unnatural transition they were led on to topics of a more tender, intimate, and secret character.

"I know that you have something in your mind, dear Juliana," said Constance, pursuing the strain into which the discourse had gradually glided; "and though I have noticed it for some few months past, and have often been going to question you on the subject, yet I did not like to do so."

"And why not?" asked Juliana, the rich blood mantling upon her cheeks. "Do you think that I should have refused you my confidence? No: I should have been pleased if you had sought it. But it involves a secret which I could not bring myself to confess of my own accord. It is a revelation which one shrinks from making willingly, and which must be asked for before it can be breathed even in the ears of a sister."

"I have not questioned you before, Juliana," was the reply given by Constance, "because you are sometimes so impetuous and hasty——"

"Ah! but in this respect I should not have been so," interrupted the elder sister. "And beside, you have a perfect right to seek my fullest confidence. Have you not given me your own? am I not acquainted with the secret of *your* love?"

"Oh! then," exclaimed the blushing Constance, "I am to understand that the confession you are now about to make is of the same tender character! I am glad of it—I am delighted at the idea that you yourself also cherish an affection of the heart: for I have sometimes felt uneasy—I know not *why* —at the thought of being alone as it were——"

"In experiencing the bliss of love?" added Juliana with an arch smile upon her lip, but still with a blush upon her cheeks: then as her fine bust heaved with a profound sigh, she added in a low and almost mournful voice, "I am afraid, Constance, that we can scarcely congratulate each other upon the objects in whom our affections are respectively centred."

"What!" exclaimed Constance: "do you mean to share my mother's prejudice against Villebelle? Ah! this has been the source of my uneasiness, when I have reflected that I loved so fondly, and that you being ignorant of what love is, could not enter into the spirit of all I experience, and would thus sooner or later be led to view this love of mine with suspicion and displeasure."

"But I hope, my dear Constance, that you have never feared I should betray you?" said Juliana, with a reproachful look.

"Oh—betray me—no! I was well aware that you were incapable of such perfidy towards me. But I trembled lest you, dear Juliana, sharing none of my enthusiasm in respect to the Marquis of Villebelle, might endeavour to wean me from that devoted love with which I regard him—might remonstrate against the impropriety of our clandestine meetings—and might even be cold to him when you were present at our interviews. All this have I apprehended——"

"But have your fears been realized?" interrupted Juliana. "On the contrary, have I not assisted you in those meetings? have I not even kept watch when the Marquis, stealthily entering the garden, has encountered you there? was it not I who enlisted our maid Mary-Anne in your interest, and induced her to become the bearer of your notes?"

"Yes—all this is true, dearest Juliana; and I was wrong ever to entertain the slightest misgiving in respect to your kindness. But now tell me," continued Constance, "who is the object of this love which your heart cherishes?—for that you *do* love, your lips have admitted—yes, and your looks have confirmed the avowal!"

"No, no, Constance—I cannot tell you," murmured Juliana. "I am fearful that you will ridicule—you will despise me!"

"Impossible, dearest sister!" said Constance. "For all the reasons that you yourself have just given when enumerating the services you have rendered me, am I bound not merely to pay your feelings as much respect as I claim for my own, but likewise to give you such succour as may lie in my power."

"But in this case there are no such aids requisite," responded Juliana, evidently approaching with reluctance the full revelation of her secret, and therefore gradually preparing her sister for the final avowal by means of hints and allusions. "In my case, Constance, there need be no interchange of letters—no clandestine meetings in the garden—no scaling of the walls—no posting some one to keep watch—no entrusting the secret to a maid——"

"I cannot understand you," observed Constance, gazing upon her sister with surprise and bewilderment. "If all these accessories and aids are not required, it must be because the object of your love would not be distasteful to our mother, our relatives, and our friends."

"Here again you are wrong, Constance," interrupted Juliana. "Listen! When our mother first perceived, a few months ago, that the Marquis of Villebelle began to pay you some attention and that you appeared pleased with his courtesies and his assiduities, she purposely insulted him, though in her own dignified and coldly serene manner; and this was done deliberately in order to convince him that his suit for your hand would never receive a sanction from her lips. The result of that insult was that the Marquis found himself compelled to abstain from visiting at the house. But still our mother was not satisfied with having thus excluded him from the mansion. She sought to poison your mind against him, so as effectually to raise up a barrier between yourselves. This she did, not pointedly as if she really believed you loved him—but by inuendo and by casual remark, always in your presence, but not as if her words were expressly spoken for you, and *for you alone*. She could not deny that he was really what he represented himself—that he was well connected—and that he belonged to one of the oldest families in France: but she

gave you to understand that he was a man of broken fortunes—that the sources of his income, poor as it must be, were not ostensible—and that it was even rumoured he had been already married to an English lady, and that his wife was still alive. These and a thousand other things did our mother from time to time let drop, in order to set you against your beloved Etienne de Villebelle."

"But why, my dear Juliana," asked Constance, "recapitulate all these things? why remind me of circumstances which at the time troubled me much? and what possible connexion is there between all this and the revelation which I am awaiting from your lips?"

"I asked you to listen patiently, my dear sister," rejoined Juliana, speaking with the seriousness of one who had not lost the thread of the discourse in any confusion of ideas, but was following it up in her own way and in order to lead her listener on by her own specific path to the point which must be ultimately reached. "What I intended by all those recapitulations was to remind you of the pains and the trouble which our mother has taken in order to set you against the Marquis of Villebelle; and she only desisted from constantly bringing up his name in a disparaging manner when I counselled you to practice a dissimulation that should lead her to believe her words had made the desired impression upon your mind and that your opinion had been altogether altered in respect to him. Well, but as I was saying, you see the immense trouble Lady Saxondale took to set you as she thought against the object of your affections; and had she not been led to believe that she had succeeded, she would have toiled on unweariedly towards the same end—perhaps, indeed, until she had succeeded in accomplishing it."

"No, no—that were impossible!" exclaimed Constance with fervour: "for you know how tenderly and sincerely I love my Etienne, and how worthy he is of my affection, despite our mother's disparaging reports. But your own secret, Juliana——"

"I am coming to that point," answered the young lady. "Ere now you conjectured that the object of this love of mine is one whom I need not be ashamed to acknowledge, and who would be acceptable to our mother our relations, and our friends. Ah! my dear Constance, great as the prejudice of them all at first was against the Marquis of Villebelle—great as it still would be if they knew that your love continues for him—yet would they welcome him into the family as your husband with exultation and enthusiasm, in comparison with the feeling with which they would regard the individual in whom my affections are centred."

"Juliana, you alarm me!" said Constance. "Is it possible that you love some one who is unworthy of you?"

"Ah! that is a phrase liable to many different constructions," responded Juliana. "So long as the object of a lady's love be an honourable, correct, and upright person, who shall dare pronounce him unworthy of that love? But if in addition to being honourable, and virtuous, and good, he is likewise gloriously handsome—a very Adonis—one of nature's sublimest aristocracy so far as personal beauty is concerned,—again, I ask, who shall dare to scorn him as unworthy the love of a patrician damsel? Yet nearly all the world would do this! And why? Not so much because he is without fortune—not so much, perhaps, because he is of humble, or what is worse, unknown parentage—but because he is in a menial capacity——because," added Juliana, tremulously and hesitatingly, "he wears that garb which is the badge of servitude."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Constance, a gleam of the real truth suddenly flashing in upon her mind: "is it possible——"

"Oh! I have said too much—I have said too much already!" exclaimed Juliana, with bitterness of voice and an almost anguished curling of the lip. "Constance, had your Marquis of Villebelle been the veriest menial that ever stooped to lower the steps of a proud patrician's carriage, I should not have taught *you* to scorn and despise him—much less have scorned and despised him myself!"

"Forgive me, dear sister—forgive me, if I have wounded your feelings," said Constance, bursting into tears. "It was unintentional—it was rather in surprise than through any other impulse: and as to studied motive, I had none! Forgive me, I say:" —and she threw her arms round her sister's neck.

"Yes, I forgive you, dear Constance," responded Juliana, who in her heart was glad that this little scene had taken place, inasmuch as it had disarmed her sister as it were of the strength of those feelings which she knew from the first must inevitably be excited by the mention of that name which had not as yet passed her lips. "And now since you have guessed who the object of my love is——"

"Yes: it is Frank—Francis Paton," whispered Constance in her sister's ear.

"It is," responded Juliana: and still farther to hush any scruples which her sister might have at listening to such a revelation or admitting the propriety of such an attachment, she at once assumed a proud position, exclaiming, "Yes—it is he—our young page—at present a mere menial in the family! But so enthusiastic is my love, that I could almost glory in it."

Constance did not immediately make any comment; but unwinding her arms from her sister's neck, she slid back to her seat, and could not prevent herself from falling into a profound and serious train of reflections.

"You have given your love, Constance, to the Marquis of Villebelle," said Juliana, after a long pause; "and if circumstances do not sooner or later turn up favourably in your behalf, I presume you will marry him in spite of mother, brother, relatives, and friends. In doing this, you will be right; because you will be consulting your own happiness I have told you so all along. But wherefore should you on the one hand consult your happiness, and I sacrifice mine on the other? Much as you love your Etienne, do I love my Francis."

"Then heaven forbid that I should venture to breathe a word against this love of your's!" interrupted Constance, speaking frankly and ingenuously. "But does Francis know that you love him? have you told him so?"

"Not in words — not in words," responded Juliana: "but in looks—by the eyes—and by the thousand and one little signs and evidences in which love even unwillingly and unconsciously betrays itself. Do not think, Constance, that all on a sudden I abandoned myself to this passion: do not imagine that the moment I felt its influence I gave

it free rein and permitted it to bear me away like a courser that I could stop if I chose, but would not. No—I can assure you, my dear girl, that I wrestled against it—I struggled—and being *then* deeply imbued with the prejudices in which I had been reared, I also felt humiliated in my own eyes—my pride was hurt—my dignity was offended—I felt indeed as if I were touching upon the threshold of a crime! But the power of love has risen triumphant above all such false notions and wretched artificialities. When I have surveyed that beautiful youth, I have felt—Oh! I have felt, that there is no sacrifice I could not accomplish for his sake. Think of all the young noblemen and gentlemen who frequent our saloons, Constance, and tell me one whose voice possesses a sweeter music than that of Francis Paton! Think of them all again—scan them one by one—pass them in review through your mind—and tell me if your thoughts can settle upon any individual amongst them whose countenance is endowed with so sublime and intelligent a beauty! As for gentility, is he not exquisitely genteel, even in that menial garb which he wears? Does it not become him as well as the scarlet uniform upon the tightly-laced figure of the young military fop? Strip him of that menial garb—let him be apparelled in the plain but fashionable clothes of a gentleman—and what evidence of his plebeian origin will remain? Besides, after all, who knows that his origin is plebeian at all? For I believe, from what I have heard, it is involved in much obscurity. He was at first a page at Court—but was suddenly removed, he himself scarcely knows why; and it was Lord Petersfield who recommended him to our mother. To a certain extent there is a sort of mystery hanging over him—a mystery which first attracted my interest, inspired me with sympathy, and led me on to love."

"And heaven grant, my dear sister," replied Constance, deeply moved by Juliana's speech, "that you may prove happy in this love of your's! But you say that as yet you have not in words revealed it to Frank Paton? Think you that he is aware that you love him——"

"I am sure of it," responded Juliana, with impassioned warmth; "and I am equally confident that he loves me in return! But he is timid and bashful, and also retiring—more perhaps from a due sense of his position than naturally so; and never from his lips dare I hope for the first avowal. But from mine—yes, from mine—shall he receive that avowal of love which I know and feel to be reciprocal! Often and often, during the last few weeks, has such an avowal trembled upon my tongue, when for a few minutes I have found myself alone with him; and yet I have not had the courage to let it go forth. But the next opportunity——"

At this moment the door opened, and Mary-Anne the principal lady's-maid especially devoted to the service of the two sisters, entered the room. The quick glance which she flung around to assure herself that they were alone, and the expression of mingled archness and importance which was upon her very handsome countenance, at once revealed the object of her coming.

"He is here?" said Constance, springing from her seat and bounding towards the lady's-maid.

"No, Miss: but this letter has just arrived:"—and Mary-Anne drew forth from the bosom of her dress a little billet which she handed to her young mistress.

"He will be here at four o'clock!" exclaimed Constance, her beautiful countenance becoming radiant with joy as she glanced over the contents of the letter. "Mary-Anne, you must be upon the look-out at the side door as usual."

"Trust me, Miss," replied the abigail, proud of being the confidante of this important secret. "I will take care everything goes well. Her ladyship will not be home till five: she told her own maid so."

Mary-Anne then retired; and Constance, looking at the time-piece, exclaimed, "It is half-past three o'clock! I must go up and dress. And you, Juliana——"

"I do not feel in the humour for exertion at present," answered the elder sister. "I will go up presently. But rest assured, my dear Constance, that while the Marquis is with you in the garden I will keep watch as well as the faithful Mary-Anne."

Constance thanked her sister, and hurried out of the room. Five minutes afterwards the door again opened; and this time it was to give admittance to Francis Paton, who carried in his hand a massive silver salver, upon which there was a periodical of Court News and Fashionable Intelligence, to which the young ladies regularly subscribed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LADY AND THE PAGE.

A SUDDEN glow of fervid delight thrilled through the entire form of the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield, as her magnificent dark eyes settled upon the beautiful countenance and symmetrical figure of Francis Paton. The blood mantled upon her cheeks; and her bosom heaved with a long sigh of pleasure as he approached.

We have already said, when describing this exceedingly fascinating youth, that he had but little colour upon his cheeks: indeed his countenance was somewhat pale—not with a dull pallor of ill-health, but with that animated paleness which is characteristic of a high order of intellectuality. Nevertheless, the little colour that there was on Frank's cheeks rapidly deepened as he beheld the regards of the young lady fixed upon him with an expression at once burning and tender. Nor less did he experience a kindred sensation of ecstatic feeling, as if catching the transfusion of the fervid passion which inspired Juliana's heart.

With tremulous fingers did the patrician lady take the publication off the silver tray; and as she did so, her own fair hand was lightly and intentionally swept over that with which the page was holding the salver. Her eyes were all the time upturned towards him, with an expression of glowing tenderness which he could not mistake, and the spirit of which it was impossible to avoid catching. Moreover, that touch had galvanized him: it had sent its electric influence throughout his entire form—an influence as potent as the magnetic source from whence it had emanated. The salver actually vibrated in his tremulous hand; and suddenly seized with confusion, he was turning away, when

Juliana said, as if with the effort of a resolution, "Stop, Frank—I wish to speak to you!"

"Yes, Miss," murmured the youth; and with eyes now bent down, and trembling all over, he remained standing close by the luxurious seat where Miss Farefield's magnificent form was supported by floculent cushions.

"Frank," she said, "why do you tremble so? why do you look confused—half frightened? Surely you can guess what I am going to say to you?——but I myself am now so confused——and yet this is foolish! Frank," she exclaimed, suddenly raising herself from her indolently lounging posture, and bending upon the almost stupified youth the entire power of her glorious dark eyes; "I love you—I love you!"

"Heavens, Miss—what do you mean?—what—what——" and the amazed and bewildered Francis stood blushing and trembling, covered with confusion, in the presence of that superb young woman of high patrician birth who had just with the effort of a strong resolution thrown at him the avowal of her love.

"What do I mean, dear boy?" she answered, with glowing cheeks and with a delicious languor floating in the depths of her eyes: "I mean that I can conceal this secret no longer—that I love you—Oh! I love you, with an affection so sincere, a passion so strong, that if you were the son of a Duke instead of what you are, it could not be more powerful! Tell me then, Francis, can you love me in return? do you love me already? Yes, yes—I see that you do—I know it—I read it in your eyes—— O heaven! it is a paradise to love and be beloved!" —and as she thus spoke the impassioned young lady snatched the youth's disengaged hand and pressed it with a warmth—nay, almost a frenzied violence, which testified unmistakably to the ardour of her feelings.

"Oh, Miss! what would her ladyship say if she knew this?" exclaimed Francis, more confused than ever.

"She need not know it, my dear boy," returned Juliana. "But tell me—tell me—do you love me? do you like me?"

"Yes—I love you," he answered timidly, while his cheeks were crimson.

"Oh! and I love you also—full well do I love you!" and the impassioned young lady threw her arms round his neck and kissed him tenderly. "Now do not go away yet—but stop and talk to me a little," she continued, throwing herself back in the chair, but retaining one of his hands clasped in both her own. "Have you any relations or friends to be kind and good to you, Frank?"

"I have a sister—but for some time past I have heard nothing of her," said the youth mournfully.

"And this sister—is she older or younger than yourself?" asked Juliana.

"Oh! she is several years older than I," responded the young page.

"And your parents?" said Juliana, inquiringly. "I heard Lord Petersfield one day mentioning to my mother that you never knew them——"

"And that is so far true, Miss," replied Francis, "that even amongst my earliest recollections I can settle my thoughts upon none whom I called either father or mother. And yet there is in my mind the deep conviction that I have more than once seen my mother, though I called her not by that name, nor did she address me as her son!"

"Tell me, my dear Frank, all that you remember in respect to the circumstances of your past life: for if you do not already perceive it, I must assure you that I am deeply, deeply interested in everything that concerns you:"—and Juliana gazed with tenderness upon him.

"The earliest reminiscences I have," resumed the young page, "are connected with a pretty little cottage at no great distance from London, but in what part I cannot recollect; and there I and my sister lived with a kind old lady whom we called grandmamma. My sister, who is seven or eight years older than myself, did not then go to school, but was taught the elements of instruction by Mrs. Burnaby: for that was the old lady's name. I remember one day when I was six years old that I and my sister were taken by Mrs. Burnaby in a hired carriage to some considerable distance from home. We stopped at a little village where another carriage was waiting for us; and this second carriage had a coachman with a powdered wig, and a tall footman with a long gold-headed cane in his hand. Both these domestics were dressed in handsome liveries; and the equipage itself was a very fine one. It bore us to a large and splendid-looking house in the middle of an immense park. On arriving at this house, Mrs. Burnaby conducted me and my sister up-stairs to a room where a lady was lying in bed. Two other ladies were seated by the side of the couch; and they spoke very kindly to me and my sister. They then quitted the room; and the moment they were gone, the lady who was in bed took us, kissed us a good deal, and cried very much. She was pale and ill, but so beautiful! We stayed with her some little time—I did not then calculate how long—I was too young for that—but as far as I have since been able to remember, I should think at least an hour. During that interval the lady treated us very kindly—made me sit upon the bed—and played with my hair—patted my face—kissed me—and, in short, lavished upon me the tenderest endearments. She showed an equal affection towards my sister; and when Mrs. Burnaby was about to take us away again, the lady cried so bitterly that I remember both I and my sister cried also. The handsome carriage bore us back to the same spot where it had received us; and there we changed into the hired vehicle which had brought us thither in the earlier part of the day, and which now took us home again. The following week my sister was sent to a boarding-school on the sea-coast: but I remained with Mrs. Burnaby. A year after the mysterious visit to the invalid lady, Mrs. Burnaby one evening took me into London in a hackney-coach; and I remember that it stopped at a place which seemed to me at the time like an old church, for it had a tower with an immense clock-face upon it. We entered this building; and as we ascended the stairs Mrs. Burnaby told me in a whisper that I was going to see the same lady whom I had visited in the country a year before. I was pleased: for I loved that lady on account of her affectionate kindness towards me —and because I felt it was sweet to love and think of her! I recollect a gentleman, dressed in black and with a star on his breast, coming out of a room and speaking for some time in a whisper to Mrs.

Burnaby; so that I did not hear what they said When their conversation was done, the gentleman led us along a passage into a magnificent room, where he left us. There were a great many pictures in that room—some representing male portraits with crowns on their heads and sceptres in their hands; and having seen little wood-engravings of similar portraits in the *History of England* out of which I learnt, I asked Mrs. Burnaby if those were not likenesses of the same kings that were depicted in the book. But before she gave me any answer the door opened, and that lady whom I had seen at the mansion in the country, made her appearance. She shook hands with Mrs. Burnaby, and catching me up in her arms, covered me with kisses. She was beautifully dressed, and looked much better than when I had seen her lying in bed. Then she was sick and ill, and very pale: now she had a fine colour on her cheeks. I recollect perfectly well asking her whether she was my mamma? But instead of answering me, she pressed me again to her bosom, and her tears moistened my cheeks. On this occasion I was not more than half-an-hour with her; and as Mrs. Burnaby took me away again, we met in the passage that same gentleman whom I had previously seen and who had the star on his breast."

"All this is very singular, my dear Frank," said Juliana, who listened with a deepening interest to the youth's recital. "Proceed: I am dying to hear the rest!"

"About ten months after the incident I have just related," resumed the young page, "poor Mrs. Burnaby met with a severe accident through a fall; and after a short illness she died. I wept very much, for I loved her dearly: but the servant-woman told me that Mrs. Burnaby was not my grandmamma at all—and indeed no relation. I remember that the young woman looked very sly and knowing as she told me this, and bade me not mention what she had said to anybody who might come to the cottage to superintend the funeral. I thought it very strange, and put some questions to the servant which were naturally suggested even to my young and inexperienced mind: but she would tell me nothing more—or perhaps she knew no more to tell. The day after Mrs. Burnaby's death, that gentleman whom I had seen with a star upon his breast, came to the cottage; and the first thing he did was to open the deceased lady's desk, take out all her papers, and examine them. Some he burnt—others he put in his pocket: for I was in the room the whole time. I stayed in the house till after the funeral, which I remember was very plainly and privately conducted; and then the gentleman of whom I have spoken, came and took me away with him in a carriage. We proceeded straight to that same mansion in the country where I had seen the lady for the first time; and there I was again conducted into her presence. She was seated in a splendidly furnished apartment, with those two other ladies who were by her bedside on the former occasion; and these two ladies having caressed me, quitted the room with the gentleman, leaving me alone with the lady. I was then eight years old. She asked me if I recollected her? and when I replied in the affirmative, she inquired if I had ever thought of her since I had seen her last? I assured her that I had often and often thought of her—that I had cried at night when remembering how she had wept over me—and that I had often dreamt I saw her bending over my couch and looking kindly upon me. Oh! how fast her tears fell as I told her these things;—and she was such a beautiful lady! I loved her so—and I felt so happy when she strained me in her arms and embraced me! On this occasion she kept me with her for several hours; and it was evening when the gentleman of whom I have spoken came to fetch me away. The lady appeared almost frantic at parting from me; and I recollect that she exclaimed more than once, '*Poor boy! perhaps I shall never see thee again!*'—I cried very bitterly: for I felt that I should have liked to live with that lady altogether. She cut off a lock of my hair; and then having embraced me again and again, consigned me back to the care of the gentleman of whom I have spoken. The carriage was in readiness at a side-door; and as I was whirled away from that mansion, I felt so truly unhappy that my young heart seemed as if it would break. The gentleman said little to console me; for although he was not exactly cross, yet he was reserved and distant. We travelled for a few hours, and at length stopped at an hotel in some town, where we passed the night. On the following morning our journey was resumed in the carriage, with post horses; and in the middle of the day we reached Southampton. It was here that my sister was at school; and I was to be placed at the same establishment. But here I should explain that this academy was kept by a gentleman and his wife, who divided it into two branches—the former conducting a boys' seminary, and the latter a school for young ladies, they having two large houses which adjoined each other. It was in the male department of the academy that I was placed. My sister, who was now sixteen, and whom I had not seen for two years, had grown wondrously: she was a fine tall girl, and looked indeed like a young woman. She had not previously been informed of Mrs. Burnaby's death; and when she now learnt it, she was much afflicted."

"Had your sister hitherto believed that the good old lady was a near relative?" inquired Juliana.

"Yes," returned Francis; "and she was much amazed when I told her what the servant-woman had said to me upon the subject. At that school my sister remained for four years longer, and therefore till she was twenty: but during the latter portion of the time she was there as a teacher or assistant, for which she was paid a regular salary. At the expiration of that period she was told by the schoolmistress that a situation had been found for her as governess in a family about to visit the Continent; and with many tears were we thus compelled to separate. I remained at the academy until I was sixteen, passing all the holidays there, and never being visited by a single soul in the shape of relation or friend. So I suppose that I had no relatives save my sister—and no friends in the world!"

"Poor Frank!" murmured Juliana, as the youth's voice sounded low and plaintive to her ears. "But were you well treated during the time?"

"With that negative sort of kindness which is no kindness at all," he answered. "That is to say, I was not ill-treated—I had enough to eat and drink,

and an allowance of pocket-money. I was also well clothed; and thus far wanted for nothing. But no kind word was ever spoken to me—no endeavour was made to solace my young heart in the dreary monotony of the life which I led. Well, the eight years passed away; and when I reached the age of sixteen, I was one morning told by the schoolmaster that I was no longer to remain under his care, but was to proceed to London. I asked him what were the future intentions of those invisible persons who appeared to have the control of my destiny? but he was either really ignorant upon the subject, or else had his own private motives for refusing to give me any information thereon. He wrote upon a piece of paper the name of an hotel where I was to stop on my arrival in London; and giving me money for my journey, he bade me farewell. It was eight o'clock in the evening when I reached the metropolis; and it was at *Hatchett's Hotel* in Piccadilly where, according to the instructions given, I took up my quarters. On the following morning, just as I had concluded my breakfast, I received a letter which had been left for me, and which came from a clerk in the Lord Steward's office at Buckingham Palace. This letter informed me that the situation of Page-of-the-Back-Stairs in the Royal Household was at my service. I was delighted. There seemed to be something grand in being one of the Queen's Pages; and methought it would furnish the stepping-stone to a career in which I should be enabled by zeal and good conduct to push my way to higher posts—perhaps to eminence! With a beating heart and exultant spirits did I repair to the palace; but scarcely had I entered upon the duties of my situation, when I found that they were entirely of a menial character. I had hoped to become a Gentleman Page; but I found myself cruelly disappointed. Yet, what could I do? My means of existence depended upon an absolute resignation to my lot: for if I threw up my post, to whom could I apply for employment? I therefore made up my mind to fulfil my destiny with as much cheerfulness as possible: but as I lay awake at nights I could not help asking myself many questions, and suffering my imagination to wander in a bewildering maze of conjectures. Why had I been brought up genteelly, if only intended for a menial office? wherefore had I been educated with young gentlemen at a boarding-school and taught to believe myself a gentleman also, if no brighter lot than that of a lacquey were in reserve for me? how was it that having in my earliest youth been fondled and caressed by an elegant lady, the influence of her love, even though following me unperceived, had not saved me from such a degradation as this? These and a thousand other questions did I ask myself: but no solution could I possibly find for them. Various circumstances however gradually transpired to make me acquainted with new and still more bewildering facts associated with my earlier years. On the very first occasion, after my installation at Buckingham Palace, that I had an opportunity of walking out to view the metropolis, I chanced to pass down St. James's Street; and the moment I caught a glimpse of the old red brick building at the bottom, I recognized it. Yes—though nine years had elapsed since I first beheld that old tower with the huge clock-face, I had never forgotten it. Still ignorant of what the building was, I inquired of a passer-by: he told me it was St. James's Palace, and then hurriedly continued his way, thinking that mine was the mere question of curiosity put by a stranger in London. But he left me there, nailed to the spot with astonishment. St. James's Palace! Was that lady who had embraced me so tenderly—who had wept over me—and who did not answer me when I asked if she were my mother—was *she* a dweller in that palace? If so, must she not be connected with the Court? and in my present position was it not probable that I should sooner or later fall in with her? Oh! but if she were dead? I burst into tears at the thought; and perceiving that I had already become the object of attention on the part of several persons in the street, I rushed rapidly on. In order to convince myself that I was not mistaken in respect to the identity of St. James's Palace with that building to which Mrs. Burnaby had conducted me to see the beautiful lady whose tearful countenance was always uppermost in my mind, I approached the edifice and examined its exterior narrowly. Yes—it *was* the same: there could be no doubt of it! And it was in that palace, therefore, that on one occasion I had seen her whom I believed to be my mother!"

Francis Paton again paused through deeply stirred emotions: and Juliana, making him bend down towards her, lavished tender caresses upon his exquisitely handsome countenance. She then besought him to proceed; and he continued his narrative in the following manner:—

"A few weeks after the incident I have just mentioned, her Majesty the Queen held a levee at St. James's Palace. My duties called me thither; and I inwardly hoped that I should have an opportunity of still farther confirming my belief that it was indeed *there* I had seen the lady of my story. Nor was I disappointed. I recognized the very corridor in which Mrs. Burnaby had stopped to carry on her whispered conversation with the gentleman having the star upon his breast—or rather the nobleman; for such, since my acquaintance with courtly usages, I had found he must be, the star being the emblem of his aristocratic rank. And the room where I had seen the lady? Yes—I had no trouble in recognizing that also: for there were the portraits of the Kings of England, with the crowns upon their heads and the sceptres in their hands! As I stood in that room surveying those and all other familiar objects, what a gush of memories swept through my brain! what a tide of emotions surged up in my breast! Methought that I still beheld that lady with her beautiful countenance all bedewed in tears, seated on the sofa where I had once seen her, and where too I had sat upon her knees and been strained to her bosom;—and for a few minutes I was blinded with my weeping. Oh! if she were my mother? Why, why was I unacknowledged—and my sister also? Was it that we were the children of shame? Alas, alas, poor mother!"

Again did Francis Paton pause, well nigh overcome by his emotions; and Juliana, deeply touched by his tale, lavished upon him the tenderest caresses. She spoke soothingly to him—she said all she could think of to break down the artificial barrier which separated them and make him feel himself upon an equal and familiar footing. The youth saw and appreciated these evidences of love on her part, and was profoundly moved thereby; so that it was with

a tone and manner of greater confidence that he thus resumed his narrative:—

"If any doubt had previously existed in my mind in respect to St. James's Palace being the place where I had seen that lady whom I always think of as my mother, it was now cleared up. But who was she? who could she have been? Some one of no mean rank: for on two occasions had I seen elegantly dressed ladies with her, apparently in attendance upon her, and treating her with deference and respect. Moreover, that nobleman with a star upon his breast—was he not in some way closely connected with that lady or with her secret?—for that there *was* a secret, and that this mystery regarded my sister and myself, it was impossible to doubt. However, I will not dwell upon all the ideas which suggested themselves—all the conjectures that I formed; because they led to nothing. Let me continue my narrative. Weeks and months passed away; and never amidst the crowd of titled dames who visited at the palace, did I catch a glimpse of that *one* countenance which above all others I would have given worlds to behold!"

"And should you recollect it now, if you beheld that countenance, Frank?" inquired Juliana, more and more interested in the youth's strange and romantic story.

"Recollect it, Miss?" he exclaimed. "Oh! it were impossible to forget it! Even if I had never seen that lady but once—and even if it were only on that first occasion when I was but six years old—her image would have remained indelibly impressed upon my mind. But recollect, Miss Farefield, that on two subsequent occasions did I behold that lady at about a year's interval each time, and that on the last occasion I was eight years old. At this age the mind is callous and insensible to many things, but equ lly susceptible and sensitive in other things. Amidst the Alpine forests there is a tree which if, when a tender sapling, a name be engraved upon it, will, as it grows with the progress of years, retain the inscription thus made; and while increasing in bulk and height, it still preserves the name indented upon its rind—and the larger it becomes the deeper, the wider, and the more palpable grows the inscription also. So it is with certain images which are engraven upon the youthful heart. The human sapling grows up to man's estate, and time instead of obliterating the inscription, deepens it, makes it spread over a wider space of the heart, and allows it not to be effaced."

"Frank," murmured Juliana, gazing upon the youth in mingled astonishment and adoration, "it is something ineffably sweet, though mournful and touching, to hear you talk thus. Oh, if my image could only be imprinted thus indelibly upon your heart, how happy should I be! But ere now you addressed me as Miss Farefield. When we are alone together, let there henceforth be no ceremony between us. Away, away," cried the impassioned young lady, "with all cold formalities! To me you are *Frank*—and to you I am *Juliana!*"

The youth, who in his inexperience of the human heart mistook this gush of impassioned feelings for the purest and chastest love—a mistake which Juliana herself also made in respect to her own emotions—was enraptured by the language, the looks, and the caresses of that splendid patrician lady; and amidst all the mournful reminiscences which the recital of his history had conjured up, he felt soothed and consoled by her kind words and her tender sympathy: so that bending down as he stood by her chair, he kissed her unasked. She embraced him with glowing ardour; and after this interchange of caresses, he resumed his narrative.

"I have already said that weeks and months passed away, and gradually the hope of meeting that lady whom I so much longed to see, died within me. At length I was one day startled by encountering in the great hall of Buckingham Palace that nobleman whom I have so often mentioned in my narrative—the one whom I saw first with a star upon his breast, and who had subsequently placed me at the boarding-school at Southampton. Though nine years had elapsed since last I beheld him—and though he looked very much older, and was even much altered, yet was I convinced that it was he. Obeying a natural impulse, I hastened forward and presented myself before him. 'My lord,' I said, without then knowing his name, but merely being aware of his rank, 'I am Francis Paton?'—Conceive my astonishment when surveying me with cold and inscrutable look, he answered, 'Well, my lad, and who is Francis Paton?'—I said that I was astonished—I might have added that I was astounded—dismayed; and for the instant it really struck me that I must have made a mistake. But another and still more scrutinizing survey of that nobleman convinced me that I had not: I would have staked my soul upon the issue, could the matter have been put to the test.—'My lord,' I exclaimed, with an indignation which I could not control, 'I am that Francis Paton whom you took from the cottage where Mrs. Burnaby died, to a mansion in the country where I saw a lady whom I had seen before and whom I would give worlds to see again. I am he also whom your lordship placed at a seminary in Southampton; and I am much mistaken if it be not also to your lordship that I am indebted for the bread of servitude which I now eat.'"

"You spoke with spirit, Frank," observed Juliana.

"The last portion of my speech was uttered with bitterness and reproach," exclaimed the youth. "But it was without effect. The nobleman continued cold—unmoved—inscrutable. If he displayed any emotion at all, it was an affectation of surprise, as he said, 'Young man, you are talking in enigmas. I know nothing of the incidents to which you allude; and they are evidently secrets into which I have no right to pry. But as you have made such a mistake without sinister design, I will not chide. On the contrary, I am rather inclined to take an interest in you; and therefore if ever you need a friend, do not hesitate to apply to me.'—'Oh, my lord,' I exclaimed, 'torture me not with this assumed ignorance of the past; but tell me who and where is the lady that I long to claim as my mother!'—'Young man,' responded the nobleman, 'it is useless for you to address me in this manner. Let it be sufficient for you that the romantic singularity of the present occurrence which has led you to mistake me for another, has so far enlisted my sympathy that I will prove your friend.'—He then passed rapidly on through the hall; but ere he issued forth from the palace, I inquired of a fellow-page who made his appearance there at the

moment, who that nobleman was?—'Lord Petersfield,' was the answer."

"Lord Petersfield!—my father's trustee—my brother's guardian—my mother's intimate friend!" exclaimed Juliana. "But I ought to have suspected as much, knowing that it was he who recommended you to Lady Saxondale. Proceed, dear Frank—proceed."

"That Lord Petersfield was he whom I had seen in my earlier years, I felt convinced," resumed the youth, "notwithstanding his denial. Wherefore should he have proffered me his interest—he even used the word friendship—unless I had that claim upon him? But what connexion was there between him and the lady whom I regarded as my mother? was he a relation or merely a friend? Vain queries were these that I put to myself! and how futile were all the conjectures they raised up! But without dwelling at too great a length on this part of my narrative, let me hasten on to relate another incident. A few weeks after I had thus encountered Lord Petersfield, her Majesty the Queen gave a Concert at Buckingham Palace. A thousand cards of invitation were issued; and at the appointed hour the vicinage of the royal dwelling was crowded with brilliant equipages. My duty on the occasion placed me in a kind of ante-chamber through which the company had to pass to the Yellow Drawing Room, where the guests were first to assemble ere the Concert-Room was thrown open. For some time there was a continuous flow of all the *elite* of rank and fashion: but for a brief interval there was a pause—a lapse, so to speak—in the living stream; and thus two or three minutes passed ere any fresh arrivals made their appearance. At length I heard footsteps approaching—light airy steps—and the rustling of dresses. The next moment two ladies, whose ages might respectively have been thirty-two and thirty—(but they were not sisters, at least to judge from their looks)—entered the ante-chamber on their way to the State Apartments. Ah, those faces! I recollected them in a moment—they were the same I had seen by the couch of the lady at the country-mansion—the same I had subsequently seen, also, at that mansion, on the last occasion of my being conducted thither! For observe, Miss Farefield—Juliana, I mean——dear Juliana!——observe, I say, that my memory has not only been vividly keen and scrupulously faithful relative to all incidents associated with the mysteries of my earlier years, but will remain immortal in that respect. Be not surprised, therefore, if I at once knew those ladies. Though years had passed over their heads, yet in their passage they had merely developed and perhaps heightened but by no means marred and little changed the mingled sweetness and glory of their charms. Obedient to that same impulse which had urged me to address Lord Petersfield, I sprang forward and threw myself pointedly, but not rudely, in their way.—'What is it?' they both asked in a breath: and at that moment I can well believe they recollected me not.—'I am Francis Paton,' I said; and then I exclaimed, 'Oh, you recognize me! you know me now!' for I saw that they both started and then exchanged looks of mingled uneasiness and surprise. But instantaneously recovering themselves, and as if in pursuance of the same tacitly understood resolve how to act, they said coldly, 'There is some mistake'—and passed on. I fell back confounded, and sank overpowered on a seat: then I burst into tears—for the conviction struck to my soul that all those who *could* tell me anything of my mother, were inspired by the terrible determination to ignore my claims upon their sympathy and their confidence. The approach of fresh arrivals recalled me to myself: I dashed away the tears from my eyes, and rising from the seat, resumed my post at the door of the ante-chamber. Then, as I regained my composure—or at least was able to collect my ideas—I resolved to watch those two ladies when they came forth again—ascertain who they were—and thus endeavour, by making inquiries concerning them, to follow up the clue, if any were thus afforded, in the hope of reaching the desired aim and discovering who that lady was that had left her image so indelibly impressed on my soul. But in this design I was disappointed. When the concert broke up, some portion of the visitors took their departure by one avenue of egress and some portion by another; and thus I missed the two ladies whom I so anxiously sought. From that day forth I have never again seen them."

"Did they not visit the palace again?" asked Juliana.

"I cannot say," replied Francis; "for within a week I was somewhat summarily informed that my farther services would be dispensed with, inasmuch as some reduction was to be made in certain departments of the royal household, and that the juniors in each were to be first dismissed. I was however assured that so far from any fault being found with me, I had given the utmost satisfaction; and as a proof thereof three months' salary was paid and the best testimonials presented to me. I could not help thinking that the true cause had not been assigned for my dismissal: a secret voice appeared to whisper within me to the effect that it was found inconvenient, and perhaps dangerous, in certain quarters to stand the chance of being accosted or importuned by me when visiting the palace. However, the day came for me to leave—and I departed accordingly."

"Then, no doubt you remembered Lord Petersfield's promise?" said Juliana inquiringly.

"Yes: but it was far less with the idea of seeking his aid in procuring another situation, than to have an opportunity of pleading my cause before him once more, that I sought him at his mansion. The moment I sent up my name his lordship received me—and received me too with kindness: that is to say, with as much kindness as it is in his nature to show. I told him of my dismissal from the palace, at which he appeared to be surprised; though in my own mind I had the intuitive conviction that this surprise was merely feigned on his part. I threw myself at his feet, beseeching and imploring that he would say but one word to lift the veil which enveloped the past in so much mystery: but he was immovable! He pretended to pity me, and affected to believe that I must be labouring under some monomaniac idea. In short, I could obtain nothing from him in the shape of revelation. He spoke kindly to me, as I ere now said—and observed that he could at once help me to another situation, as he happened to be aware at the time that his friend Lady Saxondale needed a page. He gave me a note to her ladyship; and thus was it that I entered this mansion."

Francis Paton ceased speaking: and the big tears

rolled down his cheeks, as all the incidents of the past were thus brought so vividly back to his mind. Again did Juliana do her best to soothe and console him: and the youth was both soothed and consoled!

"But during all the latter portion of your narrative," said the Hon. Miss Farefield, "you have lost sight of your sister. Believe me, my dear Frank, I am interested in her for your sake."

"I have already given you to understand," answered the youth, "that when she was twenty—that was about six years ago—she entered a family in the capacity of governess, and proceeded to the Continent. From time to time I received letters from her, and occasionally little presents, whenever she had an opportunity of sending to England. But at length, after the lapse of a couple of years, her letters ceased altogether. When I became uneasy at this silence, the schoolmaster,—for I was then, you know, at Southampton,—said many things to relieve me of my apprehensions; and it even struck me that he knew more than he chose to admit. But this might have been mere fancy on my part. Suffice it to say, Miss Farefield——Juliana——that for the last four years I have heard nothing from my sister——"

"Hush! footsteps are approaching!" suddenly exclaimed Juliana, whose quick ears had caught the sound.

As she thus spoke she pressed the young page's hand tenderly—threw a fervid look of passion upon him—and then composed herself in her seat with the air of one just beginning to turn over the leaves of a periodical placed in her hand. Francis Paton retreated towards the door, which opened at the instant; and Constance, now elegantly dressed in evening costume, re-appeared. She at once perceived by the young page's manner that Juliana had been speaking to him upon the tender subject the secret of which she herself had that day learnt; and as the door closed behind the beautiful youth, she advanced up to her sister, saying in a gentle voice, "I hope that you are happy now?"

"Yes, dear Constance—supremely happy!" exclaimed Juliana, rising from her seat and embracing her sister in the effusion of that joy which her long interview with the young page had excited in her soul. "I have revealed the secret of my love—and he loves me in return. But you would scarcely believe how intellectual he is! Oh, what a scandal and a shame ever to have doomed Francis Paton to servitude! Besides, he has told me the history of his life; and it is a history so full of strange romance and profound mystery, that I feel for him an illimitable sympathy as well as the tenderest love. But all these things I will explain to you another time——"

At this moment the door opened—and Mary-Anne the lady's-maid entered the room.

"He is come?" said Constance quickly, while a glow of pleasure suffused itself upon her countenance.

"My Lord Marquis is in the garden," returned Mary-Anne, with the mysterious look of a confidante.

"Oh, then I will proceed thither at once!" exclaimed Constance. "Give me my guitar—I will take it with me—it serves as an apology for burying myself in the shady recesses of the arbour should I be noticed proceeding thither by the domestics. But you must keep watch, Mary-Anne—and you also, dear sister!"

"Fear not," responded Juliana: "you shall not be surprised by any one."

Constance accordingly took her guitar, and tripping lightly down stairs, proceeded to the garden where in a few moments she was clasped in the arms of her lover, the Marquis de Villebelle.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LADY'S-MAID.—THE STOLEN INTERVIEW.

MARY-ANNE was one of the handsomest as well as the astutest and discreetest of lady's-maids. She was a fine, tall, well-grown young woman, of about three-and-twenty—with a figure that had something brilliant and splendid in its Diana-like proportions. Many a lady of rank who shone in the gorgeous saloons of fashion, might have envied Mary-Anne that superb shape: for nothing could be more raceful than the slope of the shoulders, the bend in the back, the symmetry of the waist, and the sweeping length of limb whose fine proportions were displayed in one sense though concealed in another by the long skirt of the dress.

Mary-Anne's countenance was not merely pretty—it was handsome. Her brown hair was of remarkable luxuriance; and whether arranged in plain bands in the morning-part of the day, or in long shining ringlets in the evening, it set off to equal advantage the fine face that beamed with mingled archness and good-humour. There was something slightly coquettish in Mary-Anne's air and appearance. She wore an elegant little French cap as if she knew that it became her admirably; and every detail of her toilet denoted not merely a scrupulous neatness, but likewise a tastefulness which nearly bordered upon elegance—that is to say, as much elegance as a lady's-maid could possibly throw into her apparel. Her clothes were evidently made by no cheap milliner nor clumsy seamstress, but fitted her as perfectly as if she were a lady of rank and fortune. As a matter of course she had handsome perquisites in the discarded dresses of her young mistresses: but these were never cobbled up anew for Miss Mary-Anne. She accepted cast-off clothes, but would not wear them—not she indeed! She disposed of them to an old Jewess who regularly paid her a visit by the area-steps once every month to purchase whatsoever she might have to dispose of: so that with the produce of these little sales and a small portion of her own handsome wages in addition, Mary-Anne was enabled to find herself in frequent new dresses of good material. As for the making-up of these dresses, *that* was done for nothing by the milliner who had all the custom of Lady Saxondale and her daughters,—the said milliner finding it entirely to her interest to keep good friends with so important a person as the Hon. Miss Farefields' principal lady's-maid.

Mary-Anne had, as we have already stated, a slightly coquettish air; and this, blended with a certain archness of expression and roguishness of smile, gave her a most *piquant* and interesting appearance. She *looked* the lady's-maid. From the midst of a thousand females assembled together, of every

variety of occupation and grade, you might single out Mary-Anne as the abigail of aristocratic mistresses. Nor was this all. A close observer could not fail to perceive that she was a *confidential* maid—deep in the secrets of the young ladies whom she served. Yet be it parenthetically remarked that she was not initiated in that particular secret which involved Juliana's attachment for the young page.

In order to render this portrait as complete as possible, we must observe that Mary-Anne possessed a very fine pair of dark hazel eyes, which she could use with no small effect when she chose, but all the glances of which were so tutored and disciplined as to be completely under her own control. Thus, in the presence of Lady Saxondale she appeared sedate and respectful, almost to demureness: with her young mistresses there was a more joyous and genial light dancing in her eyes, indicating that she felt herself the petted and favourite confidante, but still so far subdued as likewise to show that she knew her place too well to take any advantage of the confidence she thus enjoyed. Indeed, there was never anything like undue familiarity in her look, her words, or her manner. The brows that set off those fine eyes were darkly pencilled and splendidly arched; and the lashes which served as a screen for her looks when she chose thus to veil them, were of a darker shade still and resembled thick silken fringes. Her nose was straight—her mouth small and pouting, the lips being of a rich redness and always of a delicious moisture: they were lips that seemed to invite kisses, and appeared fully capable of giving them back again with additional sweets. The expression of her countenance, though naturally a mixture of good-humour, archness, and roguishness, was variable; because, as we have already stated, she had the faculty of tutoring it to assume any look that suited the circumstances of the moment.

Although so remarkably handsome, and therefore exposed to many temptations, especially on the part of the profligate Lord Saxondale,—and though by no means of a cold temperament, but on the contrary, with the rich warm blood of youth glowing in her veins,—Miss Mary-Anne was notwithstanding unquestionably virtuous. She could flirt with handsome valets and the upper class of male domestics—she could even smile mischievously and display her fine white teeth when any aristocratic young exquisite, visiting at the mansion, paid her a passing compliment if they chanced to meet upon the stairs;—but if any improper overtures were made to Miss Mary-Anne she knew how to resent them in a manner that would most likely silence for ever him who insulted her with such proposals. We do not know that it can be exactly said she was virtuous from principle: indeed it would be wrong to make any such assertion. But she was a saving and prudent young woman in money-matters—had thorough respectable notions with regard to her character—and looked forward to a good marriage with some deserving and eligible person in her own sphere of life. Thus, though Mary-Anne could smile roguishly—assist in a love-intrigue carried on by others—and deliver a *billet-doux* with all the slyness and discretion imaginable,—and though on occasions she could not merely flirt but even romp with the domestics in the servants' hall, on a Christmas or New Year's eve,—yet there was a line at which she stopped short, and beyond which it would be very difficult to induce her to take a false step.

Such was the lady's-maid who possessed the confidence of her two young mistresses generally, but of Constance especially; and she had proved herself a most efficient auxiliary in enabling this latter lady to carry on her secret interviews with the Marquis of Villebelle. She was therefore now on the alert to watch for the return of Lady Saxondale, or the presence of any other person who might interrupt the meeting of the lovers in the garden.

We should observe that of all the splendid mansions in Park Lane, not one possessed so large a piece of ground in the rear as Saxondale House. Not that this was very large either; and for a garden in the country it would have been ridiculously small; but for a town-residence, it was the very reverse. Being crowded with evergreens, which had grown to a considerable size and formed shady walks,—indeed, embowering some spots so completely as to shut out the view from all the adjacent windows,—this garden was well adapted for the meeting of lovers. But how was it, the reader may ask, that Constance could not devise opportunities of seeing the Marquis of Villebelle in places where they might be still less liable to interruption? Those who are acquainted with the routine of fashionable life, must be aware how difficult it is for young unmarried ladies to find such occasions. If the Miss Farefields went out to walk, they had a tall footman following at a short distance; and if they went out in the carriage, it was impossible to alight and leave the equipage for any length of time, unattended and alone, without incurring the risk of gossipping observations on the part of the servants. If they went shopping they were certain to meet so many of their acquaintances that it would be dangerous to seek such opportunities for the interviews of love; and inasmuch as the Marquis of Villebelle had for some months ceased to visit at Saxondale House, the only way in which Constance could contrive to pass an hour alone with him, was by these clandestine meetings in the garden. The servants, generally, thought that the young lady buried herself for an occasional hour in the umbrageous recesses of the garden for the purpose of practising on her guitar; and thus when the sounds of that instrument were heard emanating from amidst the evergreens at the extremity of the enclosure, none of the domestics would venture to penetrate thither. A side-door, of which it was easy for Mary-Anne to obtain the key, was wont to afford admission to the Marquis of Villebelle: but on three or four occasions when a half-hour's interview was to be stolen after dusk, and when the key was not immediately forthcoming, the intrepid Frenchman had not hesitated to scale the boundary-wall.

Let us now introduce this foreign nobleman to our readers. He was about twenty-eight years of age—remarkably handsome—with a somewhat pensive and even melancholy expression of countenance. Tall and well formed, his figure combined dignity and elegance. He had dark hair, clustering in natural waves above a forehead of noble height. His eyes were large and black, and with a peculiar softness of look. There was a very pleasing expression about his lips; and his teeth were white and faultlessly even. He spoke the English lan-

guage with a perfect accent and fluency: his voice, naturally low, was full of a deep music that gave to its tones a wonderful fascination when breathing the language of love.

Such was the Marquis of Villebelle. His father, who had been dead some years, was a refugee during the period of the Empire; and having lived a considerable time in England, he for this and other reasons conceived such an affection for its hospitable shores that he had his son educated at one of our public schools. Hence the intimate acquaintance which Etienne possessed in all things pertaining to the English language and literature; and in habits, tastes, and ideas, as well as in personal appearance, the Marquis of Villebelle was much more of an Englishman than a Frenchman. By the time he had finished his education in this country, his father died; and he was recalled to France to look after his affairs. For some years he remained on the Continent without revisiting England; but at length he returned to the land which he loved better than his own. This was about twelve months prior to the date when we now introduce him to our readers, and when we find him seeking a clandestine interview with the beautiful Constance Farefield in the garden of Saxondale House.

Fond and affectionate was the meeting of the lovers. The Marquis strained Constance to his breast, pouring the delicious language of love in her ears; and she clung to him with all a maiden's confiding affection, drinking in the low melting harmony of his voice. She looked sweetly beautiful, did Constance Farefield!—for she was dressed in evening costume so that she might be in readiness for the dinner-table when the hour should come. Her long fair hair flowed in thick clusters upon her white shoulders; and though there was no small constrast between her style of beauty and the personal attributes of her lover, yet were it impossible to deny that they would make a remarkably interesting couple.

"How long, my sweet Constance," said the Marquis, as they sat down together upon a bench beneath the verdant covering of the trees, "are we to pursue this stealthy and clandestine course?—a course which though marked by so many hours of indescribable happiness, has nevertheless in it something humiliating alike to your feelings and mine."

"What would *you* have me do, my beloved Etienne?" asked Constance, gazing affectionately upon his countenance. "I tremble at the idea of a furtive marriage——"

"Listen, my sweet Constance," exclaimed the Marquis, in a tone of firmness and resolution. "I have not concealed from you that my resources are small—that indeed they are so limited as to be only sufficient for *one*, and would constitute privation if not poverty for *two*. But I have now the hope of obtaining diplomatic employment from King Louis Philippe's government. The recent change in the French Ministry has brought into power an old and devoted friend of my father's; and I believe therefore that I shall not *now* have to ask a favour in vain. Tell me then, Constance—tell me, my well-beloved, will you consent to become mine if I succeed in obtaining a post which shall guarantee me the means of maintaining you in comfort, if not in splendour?"

"Splendour, my dear Etienne!" returned Constance. "Oh! let not that word be associated with love! I seek not for splendour—I am sick of the present splendour in which I live! The gaieties, the dissipations, and the frivolities of fashionable life seem a mockery to the soul that longs for a blissful seclusion with the object of its love. Think not therefore that if in wedding you I should wed even poverty, that reproaches or regrets would ever fall from my lips. No, no—that were impossible! But——"

"You hesitate, Constance—you hesitate?" murmured Etienne, as his arm gently encircled her waist; and he gazed fondly upon the countenance on which a shade of mournfulness had suddenly settled. "Tell me, my sweet girl, wherefore do you hesitate? Have you no confidence in my love? or do you believe I am the unprincipled adventurer that I know your mother has sought to represent me?"

"No, no—not for an instant do I entertain such a dishonouring, such an injurious thought!"—and Constance showed by her looks, her accents, and her manner that she was deeply pained by the remark her lover had made. "Besides, Etienne, what could you think of me, if supposing for a moment that I did entertain such a dark suspicion, you still find me meeting you thus—accepting the assurances of your love—giving you mine in return—and willing to entrust all my life's happiness to your keeping? No—deeply and devotedly as I love you, if I thought that you were other than I believe you to be, we should part at once—never to meet again! And if I could not tear forth this love from the depths of my soul, I would rather suffer it to devour my heart in secret than let it hurry me on into degradation and error. Moreover, you have dealt candidly with me in respect to your circumstances——"

"And yet again you hesitate, Constance?" said the Marquis, perceiving that she stopped short as if about to give utterance to something which she nevertheless trembled to speak.

"Oh! I will be candid with you—I will be candid with you!" rejoined Constance. "You have asked me how long these stealthy interviews are to continue? and you know, indeed you have more than hinted, that the only way to annihilate the necessity thereof is by our marriage. Now," continued Constance, bending down her looks and speaking in a low tremulous tone, "amongst the various things which my mother has at different times let drop concerning you, there is one allegation on which I have never touched before—which I have never even hinted to you—and to which I would not allude, however distantly, because I dared not so far shock your feelings——"

"Speak, speak, Constance! be frank and candid!" said the Marquis: but his own voice was now trembling as if with anxiety and suspense, and the arm that encircled the maiden's waist was trembling likewise.

"Oh! I dare not—no, I dare not proceed farther!" murmured Constance, now bursting into tears, as a feeling of deep despondency suddenly seized upon her: for indeed it struck her that the matter to which she was thus alluding did not altogether involve a wanton calumny.

"Constance!" exclaimed the Marquis, more vehemently than he was wont to speak; "you alarm

me!—what means this outburst of emotion? Is it something so very serious—or so very terrible?"

"Ah! it would be alike serious and terrible if true!" responded the young lady, now suddenly raising her eyes and gazing with a mixture of inquiring earnestness and reviving confidence in her lover's countenance. "But no—it is impossible—it cannot be true! You would not deceive me thus!"

"Constance, what mean you? what mean you?" exclaimed the Marquis, painfully excited. "Do not hesitate to speak! There must be no reserve between us——"

"No, there must not be—I feel that there must not be!" interrupted the young lady. "Some months have elapsed since first from my mother's lips dropped the statement which now weighs upon my mind; and for the reasons I have already explained, I would not mention it to you. But this day I have had a serious conversation with my sister—and I have been led more than ever to feel the importance of removing every doubt and dissipating every suspicion,—the more so, since you yourself, Etienne, began the conversation ere now by the assurance that a favourable turn in your circumstances would soon enable you to conduct me to the altar. Therefore, now—on this present occasion—must we converse frankly——"

"It is what I wish, Constance! I have already told you so!" said the Marquis with some degree of vehemence; "and I can assure you, my sweet girl, that you are torturing me most acutely by this delay in telling me everything. Say what it is that hangs like a doubt upon your mind, and to which you are so reluctant to give utterance."

"Etienne," responded Constance, raising her beautiful blue eyes and fixing them earnestly upon her lover, "I am told that you have already been married; and that although separated from your wife, she is still alive!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen at the feet of the Marquis of Villebelle, he could not have been more dismayed. It was a perfect consternation that seized upon him: he turned pale as death—the arm that was engirdling Constance, fell as if palsied from her waist—and he gazed upon her in vacant bewilderment.

"O God!" cried the unhappy young lady, "it is true—it is too true!" and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a passionate flood of weeping.

"Yes, it is true, it is true!" echoed the Marquis, in a tone of rending agony. "But good God! how could this secret have been known?"

"Ah! little matter how it was known," murmured Constance, stricken with despair, "since you confess it is the truth. O Etienne, wherefore have you deceived me thus?"—and starting from her seat, she was about to break away from him with frantic excitement, when he took her hand—he fell upon his knees—he besought her to remain—he implored her to tarry for a few minutes to hear him.

There was a desperation in his looks and a wildness in his tone which frightened Constance Farefield; and though she felt hurt, mortified, and wounded in all her keenest sensibilities,—though it appeared as if all the happiness of her life were suddenly annihilated by a single blow,—yet she could not leave him thus, for she felt that she loved him still.

"Speak, Etienne," she said, in a low deep tone clouded with ineffable emotions. "I will not refuse you a hearing."

She resumed her seat: he placed himself by her side, and would have still retained her hand in his own—but she gently withdrew it; and then her grief burst forth anew in convulsing sobs.

"Oh! calm yourself, calm yourself, I implore you!" he said in accents of passionate entreaty. "Would you see me kill myself at your feet? But I can endure anything rather than this anguish of your's! The spectacle drives me mad—because it is I who have caused it. Yet if you knew all——"

"Then tell me everything—be frank and candid with me!" said Constance. "And, Oh!" she added, in a voice full of gushing emotion, "if there be extenuation on your behalf, God knows that I shall only be too willing to admit it!"

"If you will grant me your patience, Constance," resumed the Marquis, "I will tell you everything; and you will hear one of the most extraordinary histories that ever fell from the lips of human being. Talk of the incidents of novels and romances being extravagant! their interest palls and wanes into mawkish insipidity—their excitement subsides into monotony and dullness—when compared with the story I am about to relate! And that there *is* extenuation, if not a complete vindication for the course I have pursued in respect to yourself, Constance, I may venture to promise. Nay—I do not even know but that I should have been fully justified in averring that I am *not* a married man at this moment!"

"Oh! if all this be true!" exclaimed Constance, her countenance brightening up with the animation of hope: for her's had a few moments back been a despair so profound that even the slightest glimmering which bade her hope again, was a relief ineffable.

"Shall I commence at once?" asked the French nobleman, in a low soft voice: and again he took her hand, which was not now withdrawn.

"Yes—proceed, Etienne—proceed—and may God grant——But I am tortured with suspense! Proceed!"

The Marquis of Villebelle accordingly commenced in the following manner:—

"You are aware that my father, being devoted to the cause of the Bourbons, lost all his immense estates in France by confiscation when the first Revolution broke out: you are likewise aware that when the Bourbons were restored, they behaved with the deepest ingratitude to my father, refusing him any indemnification for the losses he had sustained on their behalf. It was through disgust at their conduct, as much as through love for this country, that he preferred a residence in England rather than in his own native land. It is exactly eight years ago—consequently, in 1836—that my father returned for the last time to France, in the hope of receiving from the hand of Louis Philippe (who had then been six years on the throne) that justice which had been denied by Louis XVIII and Charles X. But scarcely had he set foot on his native soil, when he was seized with a dangerous illness, which in a few days proved fatal. I had been left behind him in England: but upon receiving the sad intelligence of my father's death,

hastened to Paris. After the funeral I proceeded, by the aid of a notary, to examine into my late parent's affairs. Alas! I found them in the most deplorable condition. In short, I inherited little beyond the bare title of a Marquis—and Oh! how valueless was that title! Better, better far to have been reared to some honest trade, than to have been brought up with the lofty notions of rank and high birth! My condition was hopeless in the extreme. I had no relations to help me on in the world—for all my kindred, alike on my father's and mother's side, were either dead or dispersed by various circumstances and vicissitudes over the face of the earth. What was I to do? The notary suggested that I should memorialize King Louis Philippe, setting forth the claims which I inherited from my father, and explaining my position. I adopted this course; but Louis Philippe had no sympathy with the old nobility who had served the elder branch of Bourbons, he being the representative of the younger. My memorial therefore produced no effect. Time passed on, and I endeavoured to obtain the influence of some eminent men to induce the King to alter his decision, but all in vain; and while I was thus

suffering the tortures of hope deferred, my slender means were rapidly disappearing. Thus nearly three years passed away; and at length I could no longer close my eyes to the conviction that I had nothing to expect from the hand of the Royalty of France. I am now speaking of exactly five years ago, at which period the incident occurred to which all that I have just been saying is but the necessary preface."

The Marquis of Villebelle paused in the sadness of the memories conjured up by his narrative; and Constance could not help experiencing the most tender interest on his behalf. She even ceased to recollect for the moment the deception which he had practised towards her; and he felt that her hand imparted a fond pressure to his own as he held it in his clasp.

"Five years ago, then—at the period of which I am speaking," continued the Marquis of Villebelle, "I found myself utterly ruined—I may say even penniless, houseless, and friendless. Alas! Constance, humiliating as it is to a man of proud spirit and elevated notions to make such a confession, yet for the sake of truth am I bound to state that no pauper grovelling upon the face of the earth was at that moment more destitute than I. What was to become of me? My education had not fitted me for business-habits; and therefore I knew beforehand that it was vain to seek the situation of a clerk. Should I become a private soldier? No: I could not bear the idea of serving with my sword that monarch who had behaved so ungratefully to my father and so scornfully towards myself. Yet was it absolutely necessary to do something; for I had not even where to lay my head, nor the smallest coin in my pocket. Suicide——Ah! you may well start, my beloved Constance!—but *that* appeared to be the only alternative! It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, in the month of June, exactly five years ago, that after rambling about Paris the whole day in a state of mind more easily imagined than depicted, I was bending my way towards one of the bridges—I will not repeat with what intention—when I suddenly heard myself called by name. I looked up, and beheld before me, by the light streaming from a shop-window, a tall good-looking middle-aged gentleman, whom by his very appearance it was easy to recognize as an Englishman. He said, 'I presume that I am not wrong in addressing you as the Count de Villebelle?'—I replied that my father had for some time been dead, and that I was now the Marquis of Villebelle; and in the bitterness of my spirit I added something to the effect that the empty title of Marquis was everything I possessed in the world.—'Ah!' ejaculated the Englishman; 'is it so? I was about to solicit your advice on a certain point; but it may be that in this wrecked condition of your fortunes you yourself will serve my purpose.'—These last words he had muttered in a musing tone, but audibly enough for me to catch them. There was something in them which appeared to shed a gleam of hope on the desolate darkness of my mind; and as a drowning man grasps at a straw, did I clutch at what the Englishman had just said. He invited me to follow him into an adjacent wine-shop, where he ordered a private room and refreshments to be served up. We sat down together; and the Englishman questioned me most minutely respecting my circumstances. There appeared to be a certain frankness about him which inspired me with confidence; and moreover it was so necessary for me to *hope*—I who had been but a few minutes before environed by the darkness of despair! I explained to the Englishman my precise position, not even withholding the fact that at the very instant I had encountered him I was contemplating——but of that no matter—I will not name the horrid thing again. Suffice it to say that he listened with the deepest attention and interest to all I told him; and when he had done questioning me, I asked him who he was and how he had happened to know me? He replied that he had met me in company with my father some four or five years back in England, when I was a youth; but though methought that his countenance was not wholly unfamiliar, yet I could not recollect where I had seen him before. He then proceeded to tell me that if the proposition he was about to make suited my views, it would be necessary for him to reveal his name, and also that of a young lady of whom he would have to speak: but ere he mentioned those names he would have to exact from me the most solemn, sacred, and binding oath that I would never reveal them in connexion with the transaction he was about to submit to my consideration. My case was too desperate to allow me to offer any objection to whatever terms of secrecy he might stipulate: and I bade him proceed. He then addressed me as follows:—'There is an English lady for whom I am anxious to find a husband, who must be a foreigner, and not only of a good family, but possessed of a title of nobility. It is not under any circumstances of dishonour in respect to the lady herself that the necessity for at once marrying her thus exists. She is pure and spotless, so far as it is possible for any one to judge of the character of a woman or become a guarantee for her chastity. Therefore it is to cover no fault that this speedy matrimonial alliance is sought for. What the circumstances are which render it necessary, cannot be explained. She is exceedingly handsome: but her beauty will matter little to him who becomes her husband, inasmuch as the moment after the ceremony they will be separated and will see each other no more. You now understand me. If you think fit to bestow your name—for it will be naught beyond the mere bestowal of a name—upon the lady in question, you shall receive the sum of five thousand pounds, speaking in English money, the moment after the ceremony has taken place. Such is my proposition. Take twelve, or even twenty-four hours to consider it, if you like: but at the expiration of that interval your answer must be given.'"

The Marquis of Villebelle paused; and Constance who had listened with a deep and absorbing interest, now gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment.

"You may well be surprised, sweet girl," said the Marquis: "for I myself was astounded by the strangeness of the Englishman's proposition. And yet I was scarcely displeased at it. Five thousand pounds—a hundred and twenty-five thousand francs—to a man who was homeless, penniless, friendless, and starving! The temptation was too great; and after all, what was the service to be rendered in order to procure such a sum? Merely the bestowal of a name and title so utterly worthless to me that

a few minutes back I had been hurrying forward to bury them along with myself in the deep waters of the Seine. Oh! you can scarcely think ill of me, Constance, when I confess that I found the offer too cheering, too magnificent, to be refused, and that instead of taking twenty-four hours or even twelve hours to reflect upon the point, I gave my assent at once. The Englishman then told me his own name and that of the young lady to whom I was to be married. Her surname was quite different from his own; and therefore I did not suppose her to be his daughter. I however asked him if such were the case? and he said she was not—but he enjoined me not to question him any farther, as there was so deep a mystery attached to this young lady and the necessity for maintaining it was so absolute, he must decline furnishing me with any clue for its unravelment. He then placed a purse of money in my hand and bade me meet him at the same place on the following day at eleven o'clock. We separated—and I was no longer houseless nor penniless: but throughout the night I could scarcely close my eyes in slumber. The proposition to which I had assented was so extraordinary that again and again did I hesitate whether to proceed any farther in the matter: but the grim gaunt spectre of poverty constantly rose up before my eyes and made all my scruples vanish. Morning came; and with some portion of the money contained in the purse I made such improvements in my toilet as were suitable for the ceremony about to take place. Punctual to the hour was I at the wine-shop;—the Englishman had already arrived and was waiting for me. He doubtless saw by my looks that I had not changed my mind; and he did not therefore ask me the question. A hackney-coach was summoned, and he ordered it to take us to an hotel, which he named, in another part of Paris. On arriving there, he introduced me to a suite of apartments, in one of which he requested me to be seated for a few minutes. He then passed into an inner room, and shortly re-appeared, accompanied by three ladies. One was nearly as old as himself, and whom he introduced as his wife. Another was much younger, and was intended to act as bridesmaid. I believe she was some relation of his, but I do not exactly know of what degree. The third was the young lady on whom I was to bestow my name. She was indeed handsome—very handsome. Do not be jealous, Constance, at the observation I have made; for while doing justice to her personal appearance, I may with equal candour declare that her's was not a style of beauty adapted to my taste. On this part of my narrative I will not however dwell. Suffice it to say that she appeared to treat the strange proceeding with a coldness almost amounting to an indifference that was not the least extraordinary feature in the whole transaction: for I could not help asking myself of what nature might be the circumstances that rendered necessary so singular a matrimonial alliance? To bestow upon that young lady a husband who was to be no husband at all—to give her a name which she might bear in the world apart from him of whom she had derived it—to make her a wife, yet leave her to a single and virgin state of existence, if chaste she really were and meant to continue,—all this seemed so monstrous, so unnatural, that I shrank from the bare idea on being introduced to her. There was not however much leisure permitted for meditation; because the Englishman hurried us all down to a plain carriage that was waiting in the courtyard of the hotel, and we drove off to the British Ambassador's chapel, which was at no great distance. I should observe that the ladies were simply dressed; with no conspicuous evidences that this was a bridal party. All the preliminaries for the solemn ceremony had been arranged with due care; so that on reaching the chapel we found the Chaplain and clerk in attendance; and the proceedings at once commenced. I must confess that I experienced a strange sensation as I went through that ceremony. My conscience smote me with a pang resembling a remorse: for I could not help feeling that it was a veritable mockery of one of the holiest rites of the Christian Church. I glanced towards my bride, and observed that she was still as calm, collected, and even indifferent as if it were some ordinary transaction, and not one of the serious character that it really was. For in thus bestowing her hand upon me, was not this young woman, in the vigour of youth and in the bloom of her beauty, suicidally destroying all hope of ever enjoying real happiness in the wedded state? In short, by this very marriage with me, was she not shutting herself out from the prospect of ever marrying another, however deeply she might be led to love and however fondly she might be beloved in return? But it is useless now to moralize on all the features and associations of that mysterious transaction. Suffice it to say that the ceremony was accomplished, and that the young lady within the space of a few brief minutes was made Marchioness of Villebelle. We all re-entered the carriage, and returned to the hotel,—the Englishman and his wife conversing the whole time on general and indifferent topics, for the evident purpose of preventing that awkwardness and embarrassment which under such extraordinary circumstances would have otherwise prevailed. On arriving at the hotel, the three ladies each shook hands with me and bade me adieu,—my wife exhibiting no more excitement or emotion than the other two. They then all three passed to the inner room, and I remained alone with the Englishman. He forthwith began to count down a number of bank-notes upon the table; and as he thus paid me the promised reward for the singular and mysterious service I had rendered, he said, 'Do not think that because we are now about to part, I shall altogether lose sight of you. If fortune smiles upon you and you continue independent of any friendly aid, you will never hear from me: but if adversity overtakes you and you fall into poverty again, you may rely upon receiving succour from my hand. And now farewell.'—This was a hint for me to take my departure at once; and I can assure you, my dear Constance, that I had no inclination to remain—for I already began not merely to loathe myself, but likewise all who were connected with the transaction."

The Marquis of Villebelle ceased; and Constance Farefield sat gazing upon him with looks of mingled commiseration and uncertainty. She pitied him for all he had gone through—she could scarcely blame him for the step he had taken, under such peculiar circumstances, in order to save himself from the horrors of poverty and the dismal alternative of suicide: but she was bewildered how she herself could thenceforth act toward him. Suddenly a re-

collection flashed to her mind, bringing hope along with it; and she said in an excited tone, "But did you not tell me ere now that you would be almost justified in declaring yourself to be unmarried? What meant you by that averment? what did it signify? what am I to understand? Speak, speak, Etienne! You know not what torturing suspense I at this moment endure: for all my happiness hangs upon the next word that may fall from your lips!"

"I will soon explain myself, dear Constance," replied the Marquis, his countenance brightening up somewhat, or at all events losing a portion of the melancholy cloud which had been hanging upon it. "But ere I make known the meaning of those words which I spoke just now, and of which you have reminded me, it is necessary I should enter into a few more particulars respecting myself. For you must not think, Constance, that the large sum of money which I received in such a manner and for such a service, made me happy. No, no—far from it! It was the utter desperation of my circumstances which induced me to render that service and take the reward. Heaven knows that by nature I am not mean, nor mercenary, nor dishonourable. Nothing of the reckless adventurer is there in my character! I was the creature of circumstances: it was an imperious necessity that ruled me. But when it was all over, I felt as if I had committed a crime and done a dishonourable action; and within twenty-four hours of that solemn mockery which gave me a wife and her dower, but deprived me of the former and made me unhappy with the latter, I sped to the hotel to return the money and insist upon steps being taken for the annulment of the marriage. But the Englishman and his companions had gone! In order to banish the unpleasant reflections which now haunted me by day and by night, I embarked in commercial speculations, not so much in the hope of increasing my means as of amusing my mind. For three or four years they progressed favourably enough: but at length a sudden panic paralysed all my schemes, and the failure of a bank threatened me with ruin. Day and night did I toil to disentangle my affairs from the vortex of difficulty and embarrassment in which they were plunged; and I succeeded so far that I paid my liabilities with honourable exactitude, and found a surplus of a few hundreds of pounds remaining for my own use. Sick of commercial pursuits and financial speculations, I came over to England. Then was it, dearest Constance, that I became acquainted with you; and as to know you is to love you, I learnt to love you fondly! Oh, I need not tell you over again how deeply I love you! That I was wrong, cruelly situated as I am, to whisper the tale of love in your ears, there can be no doubt: but this love which I entertain for you became indispensable to my happiness—it gave me a new existence—and it seemed to promise felicity for the future. Could I resign it?—could I abandon this dream of bliss? Besides, during the interval which had then elapsed since my marriage—that fatal, that cursed marriage,—I had never seen my wife—never heard of her—could not even learn what had become of her—and had never even caught the faintest whisper to the effect that there was a being in the world bearing the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle. Secretly did I prosecute inquiries in London to ascertain if such a lady were known in the circles of fashion: but to my joy I could hear of nothing of the sort. I inquired also after that Englishman, whose name I dare not mention: for I resolved if I could hear of him, to seek him out and ascertain if my wife were still alive. All I could however learn was that the individual alluded to was on the Continent, but that his whereabouts was not known. I therefore naturally concluded that some fresh circumstances had transpired to induce the lady to discard the name and title she had obtained by her marriage with me; and it was under this belief, sweet Constance, that I ventured to breathe my tale of love and whisper my hopes in your ears. Am I so deeply to blame? Oh! if you had been less beautiful, less fascinating, less fond, less affectionate, I might have yielded to the calmness of reflection—I might have bowed to a sense of duty—I might have smothered this passion of mine when it was as yet a nascent flame. But I adored you—I adore you still—I shall adore you ever, even though at the expiration of this interview we part to meet no more!"

"But the meaning of those words, Etienne?" murmured Constance, profoundly moved, and her heart fluttering with hope and suspense: "tell me, tell me, what did they signify? For I see that there is yet something left untold—something that warranted you to declare that you would not be altogether unjustified in representing yourself as a single man?"

"To that explanation I now come," responded the Marquis, whose arm had once more engirdled Miss Farefield's waist, and from which she did not withdraw. "Within the last three weeks I met her whom I have been compelled to regard and to speak of as my wife——"

"Ah! then you know that she is alive? and you have seen her?" exclaimed Constance, in accents expressive of disappointment and sorrow.

"Yes—I have seen her; and when I tell you the result of our meeting you may not perhaps look thus distressed. I will not pause to explain under what circumstances it was that I met her: suffice it to say that we did thus meet three weeks ago—and our recognition was immediate and mutual. It was in the environs of London that I thus encountered her. She was elegantly dressed, and had the appearance of being in the most comfortable circumstances. It was rather in a tone of raillery and a kind of good-humoured jocularity that she spoke. I asked her if she had ever borne my name in the presence of the world? and she assured me she had not. I next asked her if she considered she had any claim upon me as a husband? to which she likewise answered in the negative.—'Now, understand me,' she said; 'I do not wish to interfere with you, and I presume that you do not intend to interfere with me. The necessity which compelled me to marry you was of a transient character: the purpose was served on the instant; and if we could now unmarry ourselves I should be full willing.'—These words sent a thrill of joy to my heart. She observed my emotion, and went on to say, 'Although we are such strangers to each other, and although I consequently know so little of you, yet you may rest assured that what trifling amount of feeling I do experience in the matter, is rather of a friendly character than otherwise; and I think by your manner there is something you would wish at my hands. If so, speak; and hesitate not. Do you want money?'—

I at once interrupted her with the assurance that I entertained no such mean and mercenary idea; and I then very frankly proceeded to inform her that I was enamoured of a young lady with whose love I was blessed in return—that I had not dared reveal to her the circumstance of my wedded condition—but that if it were possible to procure and destroy the evidences of that marriage, the boon conferred upon me would be immense. Hereupon my wife at once promised to relieve my mind in this respect. She told me that she was in possession of the marriage certificate, together with certain documents testifying to the authenticity of that certificate, and signed by those who witnessed the bridal. All these papers she frankly offered to place in my hands, so that I might do with them as I chose. You may conceive, Constance, with what joy and gratitude I accepted this offer. She accordingly made an appointment for me to receive the papers; and she promised that they should be faithfully remitted to me on the day, at the hour, and at the place named. We then parted, as mere acquaintances, in the same way that we had just met, our interview having lasted but for a few minutes, and the whole conversation being confined to the topics which I have mentioned. We did not even shake hands, nor make any inquiry into each other's circumstances, beyond the one question which my wife put to me whether I was in want of money. I have now nothing more to say, unless it be to add that the appointment was faithfully kept by an emissary from my wife, and the papers were all placed in my hand. I have them at my residence—I have not destroyed them—and were it not for my oath's sake, I would show them to you, dear Constance. But I dare not reveal the names which appear in the marriage-certificate and the other documents. Now, save and except the entry in the register at the British Ambassador's chapel in Paris, no evidence could possibly be produced—unless indeed by my own hand—to prove that I was ever wedded to another. Finally, I will ask you, Constance, whether under all these circumstances—especially the last—I should not have been almost justified in representing myself as single and unmarried?"

Constance gave no immediate answer: she reflected profoundly. What course was she to pursue? That she might in all safety become the wife of the Marquis of Villebelle without having her right to that name ever disputed, seemed beyond the possibility of doubt: but on the other hand, could she look upon herself as the legitimate and lawful wife of this nobleman who had been wedded to another? Again, on the favourable side, it was scarcely to be supposed that the English law would recognize a marriage such as that which the Marquis had been so mysteriously led into; inasmuch as it had never been consummated, and appeared on the very face of it a mockery too scandalous to be regarded in the light of a grave solemnity. And on this same favourable side, too, was the young lady's love for the French nobleman: so that after a few minutes' deliberation the arguments on *this* side proved the weightier; and extending her fair hand to the Marquis, she exclaimed, "No, Etienne, I cannot separate from you! I cannot resign this dream of bliss! I love you—and in the world's despite will I love you on unto the end."

The Marquis strained her to his breast—covered her lips and her cheeks with kisses—lavished upon her the tenderest epithets—and breathed the most solemn protestations, and pledges in her ears.

"And now, dearest," he said, "you will not refuse to be mine so soon as I shall have obtained the means of guaranteeing an adequate maintenance? At the beginning of this conversation, I informed you that a change in the French Ministry had given power to an individual who has influence enough to compel the King to do me justice, though so tardily; and in a short time I may expect a diplomatic situation. Then——"

"Yes—*then*," murmured Constance, "I will become thine!"

Again were there caressings, and embracings, and the breathing of tender vows; and the two lovers experienced, if possible, a greater amount of happiness, or at all events of satisfaction and content, in consequence of the explanations which had taken place on this memorable occasion.

"Now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "you shall play me one of those beautiful airs which carry such ineffable bliss in unto my heart when the music is made by your fair fingers. You have your guitar with you—and I am sure that I shall not beseech this favour in vain?"

Constance took up the instrument and began to run her fingers over the strings, while the Marquis, rising from the seat, leant against the pedestal of a huge vase that stood close by, so that his tender gaze might embrace the entire form of that ravishing creature whom he loved so fondly and who loved him so devotedly in return. But scarcely had the beauteous Constance begun to strike the strings of her guitar, when Juliana, who in the meanwhile had gone through the ceremony of the toilet and exchanged her deshabillée for a dinner costume, came hurrying down the gravel-walk with the intimation that Lady Saxondale had returned, and that she had intimated her intention of taking half-an-hour's ramble in the garden before dinner.

The Marquis snatched a hasty embrace from his adored one; and hurriedly shaking hands with her sister, he made good his retreat by the side-door of the garden.

CHAPTER XXX.

FLORINA.

We must now return to Lady Florina Staunton, whom we left at the moment when scarcely able to subdue a violent outburst of her anguish, she sought the window-recess with the seeming pretext of beholding the departure of Lady Saxondale's splendid equipage, but in reality for the purpose of hiding her tears. Lady Macdonald, not for an instant suspecting that every syllable Lady Saxondale had uttered was a dagger plunged deep down into the heart of her niece, began commenting in the bitterest manner upon the presumed insolence of William Deveril; and thus each word spoken by the aunt produced a fresh pang in the bosom of the gentle Florina. Still however did the unhappy young lady remain in the room: for she was afraid that by a too precipitate retreat she would excite Lady Macdonald's suspicion. It was an excru-

ciation well nigh intolerable which Florina thus suffered—or rather a series of excruciations more poignant than any that had ever previously entered into her young heart's experience.

Presently, after having delivered herself of an immensely long tirade of invectives against the young artist, Lady Macdonald rang the bell furiously; and when a footman answered the summons, she said, "When Mr. Deveril calls at the house again, you will tell him that his services can be dispensed with for the future, and that if he will send in his account a cheque shall be remitted for the sum."

"Yes, my lady," was the footman's reply: and he quitted the room.

Florina felt as if her heart must burst. She could endure this state of inward torture no longer; and quitting the drawing-room, she hastened up to her own chamber, where she threw herself upon the couch and gave vent to her woe in a torrent of the bitterest weeping. Long, Oh! far too long, poor girl, was that paroxysm of almost mortal anguish,—an anguish proportionate to the love which she experienced for Deveril—and that love itself was illimitable! When the violence of her emotions had somewhat exhausted itself and she began to feel that she was capable of serious reflection, she rose from the couch on which she had flung herself in her despair, and taking her seat on a sofa, endeavoured to reflect upon all that had occurred.

She could not altogether believe Lady Saxondale's story; and yet she could not altogether doubt it. She fancied that there must be some foundation for it; but that her ladyship, either in her vanity or her anger, had exaggerated many of the details. Deeply and devotedly as Florina loved William Deveril, and dreadful as it was to put faith in a narrative so damnatory to his sincerity, yet the young lady, inexperienced as she was in the ways of the world, could not possibly imagine that it was all false, and that instead of a wanton inconstancy being imputed to Deveril, it was a sheer wickedness that lay at the door of Lady Saxondale. But though unable to believe in Deveril's complete innocence, Florina was not prepared to break off with him entirely without previously giving him an opportunity of explanation—or justification, if possible. There was still far too much confidence in her love not to induce her to adopt this course; and though tortured by horrible doubts as she was, there was likewise too much justice in her heart to permit the young damsel to condemn her lover upon that purely one-sided statement.

"And yet," she thought within herself, "what could he possibly say in his defence? There surely must be some foundation for Lady Saxondale's statements; and if that foundation be ever so slight, it is nevertheless sufficient to form a colossal monument of Deveril's perfidy towards me. Oh! who would have thought that when yesterday he knelt at my feet and poured forth the impassioned language of love, he could so soon repeat the tale elsewhere! It seems impossible! it seems impossible! Not merely is love outraged, but every idea of propriety—and even nature itself! It cannot be true! No—Deveril is incapable of such conduct. It would stamp him as false-hearted, vile, profligate——And, Oh! who could believe him to be all this? But Lady Saxondale—would *she* invent such a story? For what purpose? Surely not to gratify her vanity? She who has had nobles falling at her feet and soliciting her hand, needs not to vaunt the admiring homage of a humble artist, especially if that homage were never offered at all. But if not from vanity, was it wickedness? No, no—Lady Saxondale is incapable of that. A worldly-minded woman she is; but not so thoroughly black-hearted. Oh! I am tortured with suspense—I am racked with uncertainty. Would to heaven that I had never known William Deveril at all—or at least, that I had never loved him!"

Again did Florina's tears flow thick and fast; and her bosom was convulsed with sobs.

"Oh! if he were really innocent after all," she continued in her musings, "what a frightful indignity is this which my aunt has ordered to be put upon him! To have the door shut in his face—to be told to send in his bill like any tradesman who is discarded for insolence or some other fault——good heavens! if Deveril be innocent, I say, how keenly, how deeply will he feel this insult! And this is not all. His character will be ruined—Lady Saxondale is spreading the story——Oh! she would not dare do this unless she had just ground!—no, she would not dare do it—it is too serious—and I fear—Oh! I fear, that Deveril is indeed false. Ah, why have I loved him? There is not a book I ever read and in which love is introduced, that it is not represented as enduring the severest trials. Why does every poet depict love as being thus tortured? why does every novelist describe its current as never flowing smoothly? Because the poet and the novelist draw their inspirations from the facts passing in the great world before their eyes; and therefore it is the truth which they delineate. Oh! then this truth—this grand, striking, and imperious truth, is that love must have its trials, its sorrows, and its disappointments—aye, and that the rose of love is too often doomed to wither prematurely and perish before its time! Alas, would that I had never allowed the rose of love to shed its fragrance upon my soul: it is a fragrance which a blight turns into a plague-mist, and which instils poison where it at first appeared to be only capable of shedding sweets!"

In this manner mused the unhappy Florina Staunton, till at length her ideas reached a pitch so torturing, so intolerable, that she felt she must do something in order to put an end to this state of mind. She must know the truth at once; to live tossed upon the waves of uncertainty, were an existence which she could not endure. If Deveril had been guilty of all that Lady Saxondale imputed to him, the sooner Florina knew the worst the better: she could then summon all her fortitude to her aid, and endeavour to stifle her love in her heart. But if on the other hand William Deveril were innocent—if through misapprehension of his meaning at the time, or if in the spirit of sheer wickedness Lady Saxondale had recited her narrative—it was of the highest consequence that Deveril should be informed of what was being said against him. Thus, in any case did Florina feel how paramount it was that she should have an interview with Deveril. But how was this to be managed? When he called at the house the door was to be shut in his face. She thought of writing to him: but if she proposed an appointment, where could they meet? The circumstances in which the young lady found herself placed,

were as difficult as they were urgent. Indeed, it was one of those positions in which a very decisive and almost desperate step could alone be taken. And such a step did Lady Florina make up her mind to adopt.

Composing her feelings as well as she was able, the young lady descended again to the drawing-room. Her object was to learn in the course of conversation what were her aunt's plans for the evening. This was soon ascertained: Lady Macdonald was engaged to a whist-party at an old dowager's in the same Square; and Florina therefore perceived with inward satisfaction that the evening would be entirely at her own disposal—for Lady Macdonald was by no means likely to require her to accompany her to an "old people's party."

Hours passed away—hours full of poignant suspense and a torturing anxiety for the poor young lady. Never had an afternoon appeared so long: never had the foot of time seemed to be so heavy. Talk of time having wings and flying fleetly! he had none *then* for Florina. By one only incident was the monotony of that afternoon relieved; and this was an incident that enhanced to a harrowing degree the young lady's affliction. It was when Deveril's well-known knock sounded at the front door, and Florina almost immediately afterwards heard that door closed with an unusual degree of violence. Good heaven! the outrage was consummated——if an outrage it were? Because if Deveril were really unfaithful and inconstant, and if Lady Saxondale's story were strictly true, then was it no unmerited outrage, but a well deserved punishment.

The dinner-hour arrived; and Lady Macdonald, who was one of those persons that dwelt long upon a particular topic and reverted often to it, talked the whole time about "the over-weening insolence and laughable coxcombry of that upstart Deveril." And poor Florina was compelled to sit and listen—and not merely to listen, but also to veil the feelings which this constant harping on the same sensitive chord tried so cruelly. Yes—she had to conceal her emotions from her aunt, and from the domestics in attendance: but as she caught herself blushing and turning pale a dozen times in a minute, she trembled to the lowest confines of her being at the fear of being detected. That dinner was one of the cruellest ordeals through which she had ever passed; and never was relief more gratefully welcomed than when Lady Macdonald retired to dress for the whist-party, and Florina thus found an opportunity of seeking the solitude of her own chamber.

Unlike the Hon. Miss Farefields, Lady Florina Staunton had no *confidential* lady's-maid. She had two lady's-maids: but with neither of them was she accustomed to converse in a manner calculated to lessen her own dignity in their eyes, or diminish the respect which they experienced towards her. For, considering the sphere to which she belonged, Lady Florina was assuredly one of the most artless, unsophisticated, and ingenuous creatures in existence. Therefore, while she invariably treated her dependants with the utmost affability and kindness, never even making them feel their menial condition, she at the same time avoided anything that savoured of undue familiarity. Whatsoever secrets her heart might cherish, were treasured up in the sanctity of that chaste tabernacle; and thus was it that Lady Florina had no confidante in the general acceptance of the term.

The consequence was that she now felt herself involved in a perplexing and embarrassing position. She was anxious to go out for a couple of hours; and she did not choose the household to be aware of the circumstance. How was she to manage? Though in the purity of her heart hating and scorning anything that bordered upon duplicity, she now found herself reduced to the necessity of scheming somewhat in order to accomplish her purpose. After a little deliberation, the young lady decided how to act. She waited till her aunt had taken her departure to the house where she was to spend the evening; and then Florina rang the bell of her own private chamber. Her principal lady's-maid, whose name was Sophia, immediately answered the summons; and Florina said, "I feel so unwell this evening that I mean to lie down for an hour or two. Do not let me be disturbed until I ring for you."

Sophia, suspecting nothing, promised to obey her young mistress's orders, and withdrew. It was now close upon nine o'clock; and Florina, putting on her plainest and simplest apparel—an unpretending straw-bonnet with a veil, and a dark shawl—glided down a back staircase and succeeded in issuing unperceived from the house, there being a means of egress from the rear of the premises. We should add that she had locked the door of her own suite of apartments and had taken the key with her.

On foot did the young lady proceed to the Regent's Park, which, for the behoof of persons unacquainted with London, we may observe is at no very great distance from Cavendish Square.

As she went on her way, Florina was several times on the point of turning back. She felt that in one sense there was some impropriety in the step she was taking—that of a single young lady visiting a single young gentleman, and such a visit being paid at such an hour: but then she thought to herself that after everything that had occurred on the previous day between herself and Deveril, it was a duty she owed to her own feelings as well as to those of that individual to suffer no unnecessary delay to elapse ere she had an explanation with him. If all the worst should be confirmed, he surely would not aggravate the present evil of his conduct towards her by boasting elsewhere that he had received such a visit: and if he were enabled to defend himself completely against the allegations of Lady Saxondale, he would rejoice and be grateful for the step Florina was now taking. Thus the young lady found more arguments to induce her to continue her way than to make her retrace her steps.

She entered the Regent's Park, and in a short time drew near the mansion where she had passed the previous evening. She stood for a few moments gazing up at the balcony whence she had waved her handkerchief to Deveril: and as her heart swelled almost to bursting and the tears started from her eyes, she said to herself, "Is it possible that within a few hours after making a declaration of love to Lady Saxondale, he could have been guilty of such a hollow hypocrisy as to seek this spot in the hope of being enabled to catch a glimpse of me? Oh! there is a strange, an unnatural contradiction in all

this; and the longer I think of it, the more irresistibly am I led towards the conviction that William is true to me, and that Lady Saxondale has either been grievously mistaken or guilty of a wilful misrepresentation."

Inspired by these thoughts, and cheered with the fervid hope that they would soon receive the fullest confirmation, Florina pursued her way in the direction of the pretty little villa where William Deveril dwelt. For during their conversation on the preceding day he had informed her of the place of his private abode; and as she was well acquainted with all the environs of the fashionable neighbourhood of the Regent's Park, she had no difficulty in finding her way to the young artist's dwelling.

It was a small but neat and genteel residence, situated in a somewhat secluded spot, beyond the boundary of the Regent's Park, and presenting a very picturesque appearance. As she came in sight of the villa, Florina felt her heart beat with quickening palpitations; and on reaching the iron railings which enclosed the front garden, she was again seized with an access of hesitation and uncertainty whether to proceed. But she had come thus far—she had reached the place of destination—she had passed through the loneliness of the Park—and should she now retreat at the very last moment? should she tremble at the accomplishment of her purpose? No: her mind was speedily made up again: she opened the garden gate, and threading the gravel-walk which was embowered in evergreens she advanced up to the front door. It stood open—for the evening was close and sultry: a lamp burnt in the hall, but there were no lights in the front-parlour on the ground floor. The casement of this room was open, and voices issuing from within, reached Florina's ears. One of those voices was Deveril's—the other was that of a female; and the very first sounds which the young lady caught struck her as laden with accents of tenderness and endearment.

A sickening sensation seized upon her—the demon of jealousy again raised its voice in the depths of her soul—she felt as if she were standing on the threshold of a revelation that was to bring a blight upon her heart. Transfixed to the spot, she stood—unable to lift her hand to touch the bell or the knocker of the door—unable also to advance a step to pass that open portal—unable likewise to make known her presence in any shape or way. She was thus deprived of the power either to advance or retreat. Instinctively did she listen: she could not help it, no matter what amount of impropriety characterized her conduct—no matter how indiscreet a part she was playing. Of all this she thought not:—it struck her not that she was doing wrong—indeed she was incapable of serious or deliberate reflection of any kind. Those sounds of voices which she had caught had struck her, we said, as being laden with an unmistakable tenderness: but the words themselves had not reached her ears. Now she listened with suspended breath to catch what was being said, as if her whole life's happiness or misery depended upon the result.

"But, my dearest William," murmured the female voice which she had already heard, and whose tones were of silvery softness; "you must tell me what has occurred, for you know how sincerely I love you."

"Wherefore,"—and it was now the voice of Deveril that was speaking—"wherefore will you thus insist that I am dull and melancholy?"

"Oh! because, my beloved William——" and the remainder of the sentence was breathed in so low a tone that the sense of the words was lost to the listening Florina.

"My sweet girl, do not shed tears on my account," said Deveril, in the most soothing and endearing accents. "Come, I must not see you mournful and melancholy like this. While we have been sitting in conversation here the darkness has gathered around us—the twilight has gone—dusk has succeeded. Shall we ring for lights, or ramble in the garden for half-an-hour?"

"Whichever you please, dear William," responded that soft and silvery female voice. "Oh! how your brows throb! There, let me push back your hair, dear William, from over your forehead. Ah! I am sure that you have experienced annoyances this day. Your hand is hot and feverish. Let me kiss your cheek. Ah! that is burning too! Come, dear William—we will walk in the garden a little, for the air in this room is hot and stifling."

All this while Florina was still transfixed to the spot, a prey to the most torturing sensations. Who could this female be? That she was young, the silver melody of her voice sufficiently proved: that she was beautiful, Florina's jealousy naturally prompted. But, ah! a sudden hope flashed to the young lady's mind. Might not this female be Deveril's sister? And yet no: for he had never spoken of a sister—and if he possessed one, surely he would have alluded to her in the long and familiar conversation which he and Florina had held on the previous day? No, no—she could not be his sister! Then who was she? Oh! for a jealous heart to ask itself that question, what possible answer could be returned? what response could the fevered imagination suggest? The hope which had sprung up an instant back was annihilated immediately—almost as soon as it was formed; and poor Florina felt as if she must scream out in frenzy, or sink down in senselessness.

But they were coming forth to walk in the garden—William Deveril and his female companion! Florina must retreat—she must vanish from the scene where she felt convinced that she had a rival in the young artist's love. But, ah! her feet are still nailed to the spot—she could not stir—it was a terrible crisis in her thoughts and sensations—and if her very life depended upon it, she could not at that instant have moved a limb. Suddenly the parlour-door opened, and Deveril came forth with his female companion into the hall. His arm was thrown round her waist, and her fair hand lay lovingly upon his shoulder. But, heavens! who was the beauteous creature that thus, half-locked in William Deveril's fond embrace, met the view of the dismayed and anguished Florina?

It was Angela Vivaldi, the Opera-dancer!

A wild cry thrilled from Florina's lips—the spell which had retained her transfixed statue-like to the spot, was suddenly lifted—and as if seized with a mortal terror, she fled precipitately.

"Who is it? what does this mean?" exclaimed Deveril, as he rushed forward in pursuit of Florina, whom he had not recognized, because she was veiled, and because also the glimpse he had caught of her

just outside the front-door in the dusk of the garden, was so partial and so brief.

But as if inspired by a panic-terror, the young lady flew away from the spot where it would have seemed pollution and contamination now to linger; and she relaxed not her speed until, exhausted and breathless, she had regained the carriage-road inside the Regent's Park. Then, finding that she was not pursued, she flung herself on a bench and gave way to the violence of her grief.

That flood of tears relieved her so far that she now became capable of deliberate reflection; and wiping her eyes, she said aloud, "This weakness is unworthy of me. What! I bestowed my heart's purest and sincerest affection upon one who is the unworthiest, the most deceitful, as well as the most profligate of men! Good heavens, is it possible that so much perfidy and wickedness could be concentrated in one so young and apparently so ingenuous? Ah! rude indeed are the teachings of this day—bitter the experiences which within a few brief hours have shed their light upon my soul! I am older by many years in knowledge of the world, than I was when I rose from my couch this morning. But enough of these reflections. Let me behave with becoming fortitude—let me stifle this affection in my heart—let me banish his image from my mind!"

Then, as if to outstrip her harrowing thoughts Lady Florina rose from the seat and began walking hurriedly along the road through the Park; and though she felt her heart swelling as if it were about to break, and though the tears kept flowing afresh from her eyes, yet she struggled with all her strength to subdue another outburst of the grief that was thus convulsing her. Her dream of love was over—a sad and terrible change had taken place in her mind—the world's roses were all withered to her view—earth's choicest flowers were scattered, blighted and dead, in her pathway—existence stretched before

her like a barren waste—and the poor girl felt that she had now naught worth living for!

It was about eleven o'clock when Florina reached the house in Cavendish Square; and she succeeded in effecting her entrance unperceived by any of the inmates. Her absence, thanks to the precaution she had taken, was not discovered; and on gaining her own apartment she really felt as she had described herself to her lady's-maid two hours back—namely, exceedingly unwell.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A NIGHT-ADVENTURE.

It was about twelve o'clock on the same night of which we have been writing in the previous chapter, that Chiffin the Cannibal emerged from the Edgeware Road, and crossing Oxford Street, entered Park Lane. But instead of immediately pursuing his way, he stopped short—looked up and down—and not perceiving the person whom he expected to meet him at that spot, he gave vent to a deep imprecation, muttering likewise, "If he don't come, I'll make him repent it the next time I meet him—hang me if I don't!"

Fearful of encountering a policeman, the Cannibal walked a little way down Park Lane, and then turned back; but when he found that the person whom he awaited did not make his appearance, a deeper and more terrible imprecation denoted the ruffian's ferocious rage.

In order to avoid attracting any inconvenient notice, his bludgeon was concealed beneath his loose shaggy coat; and he kept as much as possible in the deep shades of the place where he was now loitering. For it was a clear bright night; and moreover the street-lamps in front of the mansions in Park Lane gave forth a light which rendered it all the more necessary for him to observe the utmost caution.

"Perhaps he thinks because it's a fine night, I shouldn't do the trick," muttered the Cannibal to himself: "but he's no business to have any opinion of his own in the matter. For the job of getting into a strange place without a confederate inside, and no put-up affair, I rather like a clear night. One sees better how to go to work. Some cracksmen always do their business in the dark; and though it's a good rule on most occasions, it isn't always to be followed. But here's Tony after all, blow him!"

The reader will remember a certain individual named Tony Wilkins, who belonged to the gang that infested Agar Town and made Solomon Patch's house their head-quarters. This Tony Wilkins was the person whom Lady Bess had especially chosen to be the bearer of the small sealed packet which she had ordered him to deliver to a gentleman at King's Cross; and we have described him as a young man of about four-and-twenty, clad in a squalid garb, and with a countenance as sinister in its expression as that of any one of his wonted companions. It was this same Tony Wilkins for whom the Cannibal had been waiting, and who now at length made his appearance.

"Well, what the deuce has made you so late?" said Chiffin in a growling tone.

"Late! it's on'y just midnight," was the response; "and you told me as how I was to be here as the clocks was a-striking twelve—didn't yer?"

"They have struck twelve at least ten minutes ago," returned the Cannibal.

"Well, ten minutes more or less," observed Wilkins, "isn't no great thing. Von can't be quite so particular."

"Yes—but what was the use of keeping me trudging about here at the risk of being twigged by the blue-bottles? Howsomever, we won't lose any more time. So come along."

"To tell yer the truth, Chiffin," said Tony, clutching the Cannibal by the arm, "I don't over and above like this here affair. You say you've never been inside the premises—that you don't know nuffin about 'em—that you ain't got no pals amung the slaveys——"

"But I know that there's plenty of swag to be got—and so I suppose that's enough," interrupted Chiffin fiercely. "Why, here you are as down in your luck as you well can be; and here am I ready to take you by the hand and put a good thing in your way."

"All right, Chiffin!" exclaimed Tony. "If you're so deuced sure of the business I suppose it's all safe. So here goes—and I'm the man to second you, old feller."

"But I tell you what it is, Tony," growled the Cannibal, as he fixed his reptile-like gaze upon his companion, "if so be you feel afraid, say so at once, and there's an end of the matter—'cause why, I don't like dealing with cowards."

"Come, Chiffin—none of this here sort of talk with me!" exclaimed Wilkins angrily. "I'm no coward—but I don't want to run my neck bang into a noose. You know deuced well I ain't afeard—I never wor afeard of nuffin in my life. Fear and prudence is two wery different things, I takes it. If so be you was to see a mad bull a-thundering along this here lane, I s'pose yer wouldn't go and grapple him by the 'orns—would yer? Not you, indeed—you'd precious soon bolt a von side. Well then, that's prudence. But if so be he comed right up and 'tacked yer, then I knows wery well you'd let fly at him with yer club in a jiffey. Well, then, that's walour."

"Do hold your jaw, Tony, and come along," growled the Cannibal. "There—I'll go on in front, and you foller at a distance. Slip bang round the second turning to the left, and you'll find me a-waiting."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal walked rapidly on, Tony Wilkins keeping in his track, but at an interval of about fifty yards. They encountered no policemen in their way: the truth is, there very seldom are policemen to be found on their beats in that fashionable region, between the hours of eleven and one—those officials being either at some public-house which keeps open all night, or else supping cozily with the female domestics in the kitchen of some mansion where dancing and card-playing are going on up-stairs in the drawing-rooms. Thus was it that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins passed on unmolested, and the former halted at a side-door in a garden-wall, where he was speedily joined by his confederate.

"Now, hush—and 'tis all right!" whispered Chiffin, as he flung a rope over the wall; and the

iron grapnel which was at the end of the cord, caught against that part of the masonry which overhung the side-door.

The rope was thus retained fast—and Tony Wilkins, being the lighter and more agile of the two, clambered up the wall by means of the rope. In a moment he disappeared on the other side, and drew both the bolts of the door, while Chiffin managed the lock by means of a skeleton-key. Thus the Cannibal, who was too heavy and clumsy to climb the wall, which was a tolerably high one, obtained prompt admittance into the garden at the back of Saxondale House—for this was the mansion where the present burglary was being effected.

"All seems as quiet as a workus," whispered Tony Wilkins, as he and his leader carefully surveyed the rear of the buildings. "There isn't never a light in none of the rooms—and not so much as a mouse a-stirring."

"Let's try this door, then," said the Cannibal.

"Or that there windy—eh?" suggested Tony.

"No—the door," was Chiffin's prompt answer: for his experienced eye at once showed him, by the aid of the moonlight, that the door presented the readiest and easiest means of effecting an entry.

From a capacious pocket in the lining of his shaggy coat, he drew forth a small saw, thin as a watch-spring, keen as an array of shark's teeth, and flexible as a Castilian stiletto-blade. With a gimlet he speedily made a hole in the lower part of the door, near where he calculated the bolt must be; and thrusting the saw into the hole, he cut out a circular piece, leaving an aperture large enough to introduce his hand. He was thus enabled to feel for the bolt and draw it back—a process which was instantaneously accomplished.

The door was high, and there was nothing for Chiffin to stand on to reach the upper part of it. He accordingly made Tony Wilkins go down upon all-fours; and standing on his back, he went to work again. Another gimlet-hole was made in the higher portion of the door—the little saw, well moistened with oil, was assiduously plied again—and another circular piece of wood, large enough to afford an opening for the hand and wrist, was soon cut out. The upper bolt was thus felt for, and drawn back; and Chiffin descended from his human footstool—such a purpose Tony Wilkins having served, but not without experiencing some degree of pain in his back, as Mr. Chiffin was by no means the lightest person in the world.

The reader will now understand that the two bolts of the door were drawn back; but the door itself was locked. It was a stout door—and Chiffin dared not attempt to break it open with a crow-bar, on account of the noise that would be made by such an operation. There was no key-hole visible on the exterior side; and thus he had no immediate indication of the position of the lock *inside*. But this difficulty was speedily overcome. Again ordering Tony Wilkins to go down upon all-fours and make himself into a foot-stool, the Cannibal mounted on his back once more; and then, with a piece of string and a leaden bullet at one end he proceeded *to sound* for the lock, just as a sailor at sea sounds with a cord and plummet to ascertain the depth of the water. Thrusting the leaden bullet through the hole that had been cut for the removal of the upper bolt, Chiffin gradually let out the string until the bullet was stopped by the top of the lock which projected from the inner side of the door: then keeping the string tight between his finger and thumb, so as to mark how much of it had been let go through the hole, he drew it back. To measure the outside of the door from the hole downward was now the work of an instant; and thus Chiffin discovered with the nicest exactitude the position of the lock. He next proceeded to bore with his gimlet; and having made a hole through the wood, his little flexible saw was again put into requisition. In less than a quarter of an hour he had cut completely round the lock; and the door opened to his thrust.

"Now, Tony, come gently," he said; and they entered the premises together.

All was dark within—and all was silence likewise, at least down in the lower region of the premises. A dark lantern was quickly produced from Chiffin's capacious pocket—the candle inside was lighted by means of lucifer-matches with which he was also provided—and the two burglars commenced their survey of the place. They first entered the back kitchen; and as the Cannibal pointed to the iron bars which protected the windows, he said in a whisper to his companion, "I told you as how it wouldn't do to try the game on there. The opening of a shutter would have been nothing: but those iron fences would have given harder work than you or I should have liked to try. All these kind of houses have got gratings to the lower windows. It isn't the first time I have broke into a house in this part of the world. But there's nothing in this back kitchen worth looking after. So come along. It's the butler's pantry we must try, mate."

With these words Chiffin led the way out of the back kitchen, and soon found a door which was fast locked, but which he immediately concluded to be the one communicating with the place he was in search of.

"Hold the light, Tony," he said; "and I'll get to work again with the tools."

This time he tried the effect of a small crowbar upon the door, which being of far lighter make than the one by which the burglars had entered the premises, seemed to warrant this mode of dealing with it. Chiffin, we need hardly say, was an accomplished hand in using the crowbar for such purposes, and made little noise in the process. The door speedily yielded—a few more efforts, and it was broken completely open. The burglars passed into the place, which, as Chiffin had anticipated, proved to be the butler's pantry. But infinite was their disappointment when after searching in every cupboard, they found no plate there.

"This is deuced provoking," growled the Cannibal in a ferocious manner.

"Cussed mean of the people of the 'ouse to take their plate up to bed with 'em," remarked Tony Wilkins. "It ain't giving a poor devil a fair chance," he added with the look of a man who fancied that he was cruelly wronged. "What's to be done now?"

"What's to be done?" echoed the Cannibal, in a voice which resembled the subdued grumblings of a hungry tiger: "why, hunt about for the swag till we find it, to be sure. And if a throat or two is to be cut in the search, what matters it?"

"Nuffin at all," responded Tony Wilkins. "Lead

on, old feller. You seems to know your way as if by instinct, as they say of the 'osses."

Chiffin the Cannibal passed out of the butler's pantry, and proceeded into the front kitchen; but nothing worthy of his predatory views was found there. Thence the burglars proceeded into the servants' hall, where some four or five stray silver forks and spoons, which the butler had doubtless forgotten to count up along with the rest of the plate, were lying about.

"This is summut, at all events," observed Tony Wilkins. "It cheers one on to look arter more."

"Now then, keep that cursed tongue of your's still, and pull off them great heavy boots of your'n," said Chiffin: "or else do as I do, if you have got the things to do it with."

And what was it that Chiffin the Cannibal was now doing? Nothing more nor less than drawing on a very coarse pair of lamb's-wool socks over his own thick and heavy lace-up boots. This being done, he took a pair of pistols from his pocket—saw that each had a percussion-cap ready for service—and handing one to Tony Wilkins, bade him only use it in case of extreme desperation of circumstances, but *then* not to hesitate an instant.

The two burglars now began ascending the stairs, Chiffin walking first with his muffled feet, and Tony Wilkins with his naked ones; for the latter was carrying his boots in his hand—and as for stockings, his wardrobe was not extensive enough to permit him the enjoyment of such luxuries. He however hoped to improve and replenish it by the proceeds of his share of the present night's plunder.

The marble hall was reached; and from this point, the same as from the lower regions, it appeared that a profound silence reigned throughout the house—for it was now past one in the morning, the operations at the back door having absorbed at least three quarters of an hour. The parlours opening from the hall were visited by the intruders; and though they abounded in many fashionable nick-nacks, objects of *virtu*, beautiful ornaments, and the usual decorations to be found on the mantelpieces and side-tables of apartments in the houses of the rich, there was not much in those rooms that would suit the purposes of the robbers. A few things however they did consign to their pockets; and emboldened by the freedom from interruption and the absence of all alarm which they thus experienced, they began the ascent of the magnificent marble staircase leading to the drawing-rooms and state-apartments. In the first of these which they entered, they found a gold watch lying upon the table; and there were many little ornaments scattered about which they knew Solomon Patch would purchase, and to which they therefore freely helped themselves. Thence they passed into the adjacent room; but as they entered it with as much caution as possible, they stopped suddenly short on beholding a light at the farther extremity. It shone through a door which stood half open at the end of the large apartment they had just entered.

The burglars stopped short, we say; and Chiffin instantaneously closed the blind of his dark lantern. But the two men did not retreat; they stood and listened with breathless attention. If they had heard voices in conversation they would have held it time enough to make the best of their way from the premises; but if they heard no voices, they would then be encouraged to traverse the room which they had entered and see who was in the next one, in which case they might be enabled by threats or violence to compel any person whom they would thus find to give information relative to the whereabouts of the plate, jewels, money, &c. Such were the thoughts that simultaneously occurred to the two burglars: for all men of that class act as it were upon a particular system, and pursue a course which is as much guided by previous experiences as by the occurrences which transpire at the moment.

For several minutes did they listen—and they heard no one speak. Then they traversed the spacious apartment with as much caution as possible; and the thick carpet would have stifled the sound of their footsteps even if the feet of one had not been muffled and the boots of the other taken off. On reaching the door which stood half open, Chiffin peeped in, and beheld a lady seated alone in the adjacent room. She was placed at a table and had a book open before her: but she was not reading—she was reclining back in her chair—and as the light of the wax candles fell with a sort of Rembrandt effect upon her splendid features, it was easy to perceive that she was absorbed in a profound reverie. Nor were her reflections of the most pleasing description: for there was a lowering of the naturally high and noble forehead—there was a sinister light gleaming in the eyes to which so magnificent a lustre properly belonged—and there was a compression of the lips which nature had never intended to remain so firmly closed.

This lady was none other than the mistress of the mansion; and Chiffin knew her to be Lady Saxondale. He had seen her first of all upwards of nineteen years back, when, being despatched by Ralph Farefield into Lincolnshire, he had lurked about the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle watching for an opportunity to carry off the child: he had seen her *then*, in the pride and glory of her youthful beauty—and once seen, she was not a woman who could be easily forgotten. But Chiffin had also seen her within the last few days: for he had loitered about Saxondale House in Park Lane, not only with the view of discovering as much as he could of the position of the premises, but also to examine the features of the domesties and see whether the physiognomy of any one of them furnished a sufficient indication of innate villany to warrant the Cannibal in scraping acquaintance with the view to an arrangement for a burglary. In this hope he had been disappointed: but while thus loitering about, he had seen Lady Saxondale go in and out of the mansion—he had recognised her as the same beautiful woman he had seen in Lincolnshire nearly twenty years back—and thus was it that he at once knew her now, as peeping through that half-opened door he beheld her seated in a mood of deep abstraction at the table.

A glance rapidly flung round the room where Lady Saxondale was thus observed, at once showed the Cannibal not merely that she was alone, but likewise that there was no other door open by which any sudden cry of alarm to which she might give vent would issue forth. He therefore resolved upon taking a desperate step in order to reap a handsome harvest from his present enterprise; and making a sign for Tony Wilkins to stop

where he was for the instant, the Cannibal passed stealthily into the room.

So deep was Lady Saxondale's abstraction, that she perceived him not. Her looks were fixed on the book which lay open before her: but she saw not the pages themselves—all her faculty of vision was as it were turned *inward* with the absorbing nature of her meditations. For Lady Saxondale had this night experienced no inclination to retire to rest. The image of William Deveril appeared to haunt her. She loved him—and she hated him at one and the same time. She feared that she had taken a false step and compromised herself seriously, in having made the round of all her acquaintances and friends during the day and promulgated her story relative to that young man. Cunningly devised as the tale was, she trembled lest the refutation which Deveril would give when it reached his ears, might obtain credit; and thus though great was the satisfaction she had experienced at the time, not only in torturing Lady Florina, but likewise in propagating the same scandal elsewhere, she was now apprehensive that the blow she had endeavoured to deal might rebound upon herself. In short, her feelings having been unnaturally excited during the day, had since experienced a proportionate reaction; and conscience, which "makes cowards of us all," was not permitting Lady Saxondale to be an exception to that rule.

Besides, she was not only fearful that the tangled web she had been thus weaving, would in the long run enmesh herself; but she was tortured with the pangs of jealousy towards Florina. What was she to do in respect to her whom she thus regarded as her rival? Even apart from that hatred which the spirit of jealously had suddenly make her experience for Florina, how could she possibly permit the engagement to continue between her son and that young lady?—and yet, on the other hand, upon what pretext could she break off the engagement? Altogether, Lady Saxondale's position was one of apprehension, bewilderment, torture, and perplexity; and in addition to the circumstances connected with Deveril and Florina which had thus combined to make her wretched, there were *others* which struck their viper stings into her heart.

This is not however the time nor place to analyse at any great length the feelings and thoughts of Lady Saxondale. The little which we have just said upon this subject, was merely for the purpose of accounting for why she had not as yet sought her couch, and wherefore we find her seated alone in that abstracted mood and at so late an hour of the night—or rather at so early a period of the morning. In the depth of her disagreeable meditations it was no wonder that she observed not the presence of Chiffin the Cannibal; and as he, by making a short circuit in the room, was enabled to steal as it were close up behind her before she was aware of the intrusion, it was with a sudden start and a horrible access of terror that she felt a hand suddenly laid upon her shoulder.

Wildly she sprang up; and on beholding herself confronted by that hideous-looking wretch, a scream was about to burst from her lips: but it was stifled ere it broke forth, by the suddenness with which the Cannibal exclaimed, "Silence, or you are a dead woman!"—and a pistol, gleaming in his hand, was presented close to her forehead.

For an instant Lady Saxondale was paralysed with terror: but her naturally strong mind almost immediately regained its self-possession—and she said in a voice that was strangely calm under such circumstances, "Remove that weapon: I will not create an alarm."

Tony Wilkins now made his appearance; and Lady Saxondale, perceiving that there were two ruffians, and thinking it quite probable that there might be even more, felt that anything like resistance would be altogether vain, and that if she attempted to raise the household her life would be inevitably forfeited. For it was impossible to glance even for a single instant at Chiffin the Cannibal's countenance, without reading in its hideous lineaments the most blood-thirsty propensities and a brutal capacity for mischief.

"Well," he said, pointing the muzzle of his pistol downwards, but not putting it away from her sight, "you seem an uncommon brave lady; and so I suppose you are just as prudent a one. Therefore we shall have no nonsense in dealing with you."

"What do you require?" asked Lady Saxondale. "But that question I need scarcely put: your looks bespeak your errand. You see I treat the matter with frankness; and therefore there is no need to keep that weapon in your hand in so threatening a manner."

"How uncommon nice she speaks, don't she?" said Tony Wilkins in an under-tone as he sidled up to his companion.

"'Cause she's a lady of sense and knows what's what," observed Chiffin aloud. "Now, ma'am, please to tell us which would be most convenient—to let us walk off with the plate and jewellery, or for you to pay us over such a handsome sum that we shall go away happy and contented with our night's work, and be able to drink your ladyship's health every day for the next six months?"

"Finding myself completely in your power," returned Lady Saxondale, at the same instant flinging a quick and scarcely perceptible glance towards the mantel-piece, as if looking for some object, "I should prefer giving you a sum of money. But I must tell you beforehand, that I have not much in the shape of gold about my person, and should have to go to my own chamber to fetch the amount that you may require."

"And how much," demanded Chiffin, "may your ladyship happen to have in your own chamber?"

"Perhaps four or five hundred pounds altogether," returned Lady Saxondale, after a few moments' consideration.

"That's little enough," observed Chiffin. "And, now, how much in the purse?"

Lady Saxondale, who still preserved her presence of mind with an astonishing calmness, drew forth her purse from a reticule which hung at the back of the chair; and handing it to Chiffin, said, "Count its contents for yourself."

"Eleven sovereigns, two ten-pound notes, one five, and some silver," said the Cannibal, as he emptied the contents of the purse into his hand. "Well, but all this is a poor lot. The family plate must be worth ten times as much. What's to prevent us cutting your throat, ma'am, and then ransacking the place for yourselves?"

"The plate is in the butler's own room," was Lady Saxondale's calm and collected response.

"He sleeps in the same corridor with the other male domestics of the household. His door is no doubt locked; and if you attempted to force it, an alarm would be raised. A dozen men-servants, most of them for a certainty possessing loaded weapons, would be upon you."

"Her ladyship speaks like a book," whispered Tony Wilkins. "Take the blunt; it will be a deuced good night's work."

The Cannibal slightly turned his head towards his companion to hear what he had to say; and during the few brief moments his eyes were thus averted from Lady Saxondale, she again swept her own glances with lightning quickness towards the mantel-piece; and a scarcely perceptible gleam which flitted over her countenance might be regarded as an indication that she had discovered the object for which she had twice searched. The lady's sweeping glance was so rapid, and that gleam on the features was so transient, that it was a wonder Chiffin observed either. But he *did*, nevertheless: for ere completely turning his looks again towards Lady Saxondale, he glanced at her from the corners of his eyes;—for there was altogether something in her calm self-possession, in her fortitude and coolness, which had made him suspect that she was contemplating some stratagem to effect a turning of the tables against himself and companion.

"Well, ma'am," he said, with no alteration in his own voice, look, or manner, "me and my pal is agreed to take the blunt—or saving your presence, the money—and we mean to be satisfied. But of course we can't let you go by yourself to your own room; 'cause why, it's certain sure you would come back with a posse of servants at your heels."

"I did not for an instant suppose," rejoined her ladyship, "that you would trust me out of your sight. My chamber is at no great distance hence, and easily accessible. One of you can proceed thither."

"Well, that looks reasonable enough," remarked Chiffin; "because one of us will in that case stay to keep guard upon you. I say," he continued, turning towards his companion, "you shall act the part of sentinel. Here, take my clasp-knife—hold it open in one hand—and keep the pistol in t'other. Don't be afraid to use 'em if need be. Keep your eye on her ladyship's face the whole time—it's a pleasant face to look at——and if you see the least inclination on her part to cry out, don't hesitate to give her a knock over the head with the butt-end of the pistol, or slit her windpipe with the cold steel."

"Trust to me," replied Tony Wilkins, as he received from the hand of his companion the clasp-knife which this latter produced from the capacious pocket of his shaggy coat.

For an instant—and only for an instant—did Lady Saxondale seem to quiver with a cold shuddering at the horrible instructions which Chiffin thus gave his companion, and which instructions he purposely elaborated in this cold-blooded manner in order to convince Lady Saxondale that it was no child's play and that any trickery on her part would cost her her life.

"Now, ma'am," continued the Cannibal, "if you'll just be so good as to give me all necessary directions, I'll take the liberty of proceeding to your ladyship's chamber. But mind, I warn you beforehand, that if you think of throwing me in the way of any of your flunkeys, or sending me into an ambush, I'll plant a bullet through the brains of the first that dares to lay a hand upon me. And mind you, if my friend here, who is going to act the part of sentinel, hears my pistol fired in any other part of the house, he'll instantly fire his own; and it'll be to settle your ladyship on the spot. For look you, ma'am, if we're nabbed we may just as well swing for half-a-dozen things as for one or two."

"You might have spared all these threats," remarked Lady Saxondale, still with an extraordinary coolness and presence of mind; "because I feel that I am powerless in your hands. As a matter of course if I were able, I should frustrate your designs: but I repeat, I am powerless—and therefore I am making the best of the matter and effecting a compromise with you."

"Go on, then, with the directions which you were going to give," said Chiffin: "for there has already been enough time wasted."

"You must issue forth by that door," said Lady Saxondale, pointing to one at the farther extremity from that by which the burglars had entered the room: "you will then find yourself upon a landing with a staircase before you. Ascend that staircase, and the first door on the right hand opens into my private chamber. This key," continued Lady Saxondale, indicating one upon a bunch of five or six, "opens a chest of drawers in that chamber; and in the second drawer from the top you will find the money of which I have spoken, lying loose in one corner. I have nothing more to say."

All the while she was thus speaking, Chiffin the Cannibal fixed his eyes keenly upon Lady Saxondale's countenance: but he saw nothing therein to confirm the suspicions which had been excited in his mind. He therefore resolved to run the risk of the adventure: for though he had appeared to grumble at what he pretended to regard as the small amount of money which was forthcoming, he was secretly pleased at the idea of obtaining such a sum, inasmuch as a booty in the shape of ready cash rendered him independent of old Solomon Patch; and moreover it was a very dangerous experiment to pass through the streets of London with a large quantity of plate in the possession of a suspicious-looking individual.

"I suppose there's no light where I am going," he observed; "and therefore I'd better take one of them wax-candles."

"Yes—you had better," returned Lady Saxondale.

"But I say though," observed Chiffin, again hesitating as a sudden idea struck him, "suppose any of your ladyship's maids was about—which is more than likely, as you yourself are sitting up——"

"I dismissed them to their chambers long ago," returned Lady Saxondale; "and I do not think you incur the slightest risk of encountering a soul."

"If I do, ma'am," rejoined Chiffin, with a terrible scowl of his hideous features and a savage glare of his reptile-eyes, "it will be the worst for you. Now, mate," he added, to his companion, "keep a sharp look-out on her ladyship; and if you hear any suspicious noise you'll know what to do."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin the Cannibal took

up one of the wax-candles from the table, and quitted the room by the door which Lady Saxondale had indicated. But as he issued forth, he closed the door in such a manner that while it appeared to the inmates of the room to shut, he did not really allow it to do so; but he suffered it to remain about an inch ajar—and then, instead of immediately continuing his way to Lady Saxondale's private chamber, he stopped to listen, setting down the wax-candle at such a distance from the door, and in such a position that it threw no light into the room.

But why did the Cannibal adopt all these precautions? why did he remain and listen? Because, notwithstanding Lady Saxondale's countenance had remained inscrutable in its self-possession during the whole of the latter portion of the discourse, yet still Chiffin's mind was filled with doubt and misgiving. That very self-possession on her ladyship's part appeared, the longer he reflected upon it, to be but a mask for some deep treachery. In short, Chiffin fancied that she had purposely sent him on this errand with the knowledge that he would fall into some snare the nature of which he himself could not however conjecture; and that in the meantime she would endeavour to extricate herself from the custody of Tony Wilkins. He therefore resolved to listen for a few minutes; and if Lady Saxondale remained perfectly quiet and gave no indications of treachery either by word or deed, Chiffin might then in all confidence pursue his way to her chamber.

For at least a couple of minutes after he had quitted the room, Lady Saxondale remained perfectly silent as to speech and tranquil as to movement; while Tony Wilkins stood close by the chair in which she was seated, the pistol in one hand, the open clasp-knife in the other, and his eyes intently fixed upon the splendid patrician lady whom he was thus watching. Seeing everything remain thus favourable, the Cannibal was about to steal away from the door and ascend the staircase—when Lady Saxondale began to speak; so that Chiffin's feet remained rivetted to the spot, and he continued to listen with suspended breath.

"I feel such a faintness coming over me," were the words which thus began to flow from Lady Saxondale's lips, and which were addressed to Tony Wilkins, "that I must beg you to reach me that scent-bottle which stands on the mantel. It is the one with the silver top, and is next to the time-piece."

She spoke in a faint and languid voice, and appeared to be sinking back in the chair. Tony Wilkins gave no immediate answer: he hesitated how to act. At length he said, "Well, ma'am, I don't want to act harsh—leastways not cruel: but I can't part company from yer. If so be natur' isn't so much exhausted that you can drag yourself up to the chimbley-piece, I'd raythor it should be done that way, and then I could walk by your side."

"I will endeavour," murmured Lady Saxondale, still more faintly than before: and rising from her seat, she advanced slowly and with every appearance of feebleness, and tottering in her gait, towards the mantel.

Tony Wilkins kept so close to her, and held his weapons in such evident readiness to use them, that Chiffin, who observed all that was passing from the doorway, felt perfectly satisfied with the conduct of his companion: yet he was well convinced in his own mind that this was nothing but a stratagem on the lady's part for the purpose of consummating some treachery.

"Don't go too near the bell-pulls, ma'am," said Tony Wilkins, who evidently had his misgiving also: "'cause why this here clasp-knife is terribly apt to dig itself right down into an arm when stretched out to ring a bell at a time when the flunkeys and slaveys isn't exactly wanted."

"I had no intention of the kind," responded Lady Saxondale: and taking the bottle from the chimney-piece, she, still with slow and tottering gait, retraced her way to her seat.

"Well," thought Chiffin to himself, "she meant no harm after all: but I suppose these fine ladies can't get on without their scent-bottles, any more than a chap like me can without his gin. But I'll just stay a minute or so longer; and then if she says nothing more, I shall consider it's all right."

Lady Saxondale resumed her seat, and sank languidly back in the chair,—Tony Wilkins still remaining close by her side, and still preserving a vigilant watch over her. She took from the table her snowy white pocket-handkerchief, which was elaborately embroidered all along the hems and worked with a coronet in each corner. Then, still with languid movements, she unscrewed the silver top which covered the glass stopper of the bottle. We should observe that the bottle itself was a small one of cut glass, and contained a white fluid instead of the crystallized salts usually seen in scent-bottles. Tony Wilkins naturally thought this white fluid must be some very delicious perfume: when however Lady Saxondale drew out the glass-stopper, the ordour emitted by the fluid was by no means of an agreeable taste, but on the contrary, was pungent, powerful, and unpleasant. That Lady Saxondale herself entertained a similar opinion, appeared to be indicated by the circumstance that while pouring a little of this white fluid upon her pocket-handkerchief she held both handkerchief and bottle as far away from her nose as possible. Then she hastily put in the glass stopper again, and placed the bottle on the table: but in so doing, she dropped the handkerchief.

"Pick it up for me," she said in a very faint voice: and she now looked as if she were going off in a swoon.

Tony Wilkins really and truly believed that such was the case; and while in a very guarded manner, so as not to be taken unawares, he stooped down and picked up the handkerchief, he said to himself, "I'm hanged if this is gammon: it's her nerves as does it, I suppose." He accordingly picked up the kerchief with the hand that held the pistol, and was about to present it to her ladyship, when the latter said in a tone of affable condescension, "You are welcome to smell it if you like: the perfume is of a rare character."

By a very natural and mechanical movement, Tony Wilkins applied the handkerchief to his nose: but scarcely had he done so when an overpowering sensation seized upon him with the suddenness of a lightning flash—he gave one gasp in an abortive effort to cry out—handkerchief, pistol, and clasp-knife fell from his hands—and he dropped down

upon the carpet as if stricken dead with apoplexy.

"Now for the alarm!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale as she sprang up from her seat.

But at the same instant she heard the sudden rush of footsteps; and glancing round in affright, she found herself confronted by Chiffin the Cannibal, whom she had supposed to be by that time busily engaged in plundering her bed-chamber.

The hideous rage of ten thousand demons appeared to be gathering in his infuriate looks, as he aimed a tremendous blow at Lady Saxondale with the bludgeon which he had taken from underneath his coat: but she avoided it by instinctively sinking on her knees—and stricken dumb with terror, she extended her arms in mute appeal for mercy. Had she not thus abruptly fallen down to that suppliant posture, there would have been an end of the brilliant and magnificent Lady Saxondale then and there!

"Make a noise, and by Satan! I'll do for you!" growled the Cannibal in a deep ferocious tone: and he again raised his bludgeon menacingly.

"No, no—I will not say a word," murmured Lady Saxondale, whose fortitude appeared to have all given way. "But spare my life—do not kill me—for God's sake do not kill me!"

"That all depends," was the Cannibal's brutal response. "Come, get up from your knees—but don't speak louder than a whisper, and don't move without my telling you, or I'll make devilish light work of it, you may be sure! Now then, what have you done to my mate here? Is he dead?"

"No, no—not dead—only stupified," answered Lady Saxondale. "He will come to himself again presently."

"So much the better for you," said the Cannibal. "A pretty kind of a woman you are, to be able to play such a precious tricky part!"

"Was it not natural?" observed Lady Saxondale, now somewhat regaining her self-possession.

"Oh! don't bother like that," interrupted Chiffin fiercely: then, as he gazed down upon the prostrate and motionless form of Tony Wilkins, his look grew serious as if he were revolving something of importance in his mind. "By jingo, after all," he suddenly exclaimed, "I'm deuced glad this business has happened—it's given me an idea. 'Pon my soul, I'm uncommonly indebted to your ladyship! Why, robbing will become quite an easy matter, with nothing like risk in it, if so be you've told me true that this here stuff," and he pointed to the phial upon the table, "takes away the senses just by smelling it. And now, ma'am please to tell me how a person is to be recovered?"

"The individual will presently revive naturally," answered Lady Saxondale; "and if not, by shaking him, sprinkling water on his face, and the usual means adopted in cases of swoon——"

"Oh! if that's the case, then we'll try the experiment," said Chiffin. "But mind you, ma'am, stay where you are—don't budge an inch—or——"

And without finishing the sentence, he pointed his pistol at Lady Saxondale. Then kneeling by the side of Tony Wilkins, and all the time keeping the pistol still pointed at the lady, he gently shook his prostrate companion. With a deep gasp Wilkins began to revive: and in a few minutes he completely recovered his senses, though he experienced a heavy and oppressive feeling about the head.

All this while Lady Saxondale remained standing in the middle of the room, on the very spot where she had previously knelt: for the pistol continued to be levelled at her, and she had already seen enough of the desperate and determined character of Chiffin the Cannibal to be warned how she trifled with him. Unperceived by her ladyship, and while kneeling down by the side of Tony Wilkins, Chiffin gathered up the white handkerchief, which was impregnated with that powerful and stupifying essence; and tucking it partially up his sleeve and holding the remainder in his hand, so that it was altogether concealed from her ladyship's view, he rose up from his kneeling posture

"What's all this here mean? what's been done?" asked Tony Wilkins. "I feels all no-how——"

"Nothing has been done as yet. You remain quiet and recover yourself, while I finish talking to her ladyship——"

"Ladyship indeed! she's a witch," muttered Tony Wilkins angrily, "to be able to knock down a chap with a ankercher in this here way."

"Now, ma'am," resumed Chiffin, accosting Lady Saxondale, "about this money-business. But I say!" he exclaimed with a sudden start; "whose that coming in?"

Instinctively did Lady Saxondale look round; and at the same moment the white cambric handkerchief—her own handkerchief—was thrust up to her face. The scream that rose to her lips, was stifled ere it found vent by the sudden paralyzation of all her faculties and senses; and she dropped down upon the floor in the same way as Tony Wilkins had ere now fallen.

When Lady Saxondale became aware of returning consciousness, the glimmering of dawn stealing into the room through the curtains, was mingling with the light of the wax-tapers that had nearly burnt down to their sockets; and as her ladyship's reminiscences gradually settled themselves in her brain, she looked around in the dread anticipation of beholding the hideous forms of the burglars. But she found herself alone. Raising herself up from the carpet—but painfully and feebly, for she experienced a heaviness in the head and a languor all over her form—she threw herself upon a sofa, pressed her hand to her throbbing brows, and then reviewed everything that had taken place. Rising again from the sofa, she approached the table to take a wax-light; and she observed that the bottle of powerful essence was gone. She looked on the mantel—she looked all round the room—but it was not to be seen. In the course of this survey, rapid though it was, she soon discovered that a great number of articles of value had been taken away; and now for the first time she perceived that her own person had been plundered—her rings had disappeared from her fingers—her watch, necklace, and other ornaments, had all vanished!

She now, in great trepidation and alarm, hurried away from the room, and sped to the chamber of one of the lady's-maids. There she aroused the sleeping domestic with the startling intelligence that the house had been broken into; and the other servants were speedily called up. In a few minutes all was bustle and confusion, together with no small amount of dismay. Lord Saxondale's valet was

sent to his master's room to arouse him; while Mary-Anne was despatched to the Miss Farefields' apartments to tell them what had happened and bid them not be frightened. In the meantime Lady Saxondale, with four or five of her female dependants repaired to her own bed-chamber. The burglars had disappeared: but from the confusion which prevailed in that room, it was evident that it had been completely ransacked. All the ready money in her ladyship's drawers, amounting to about the sum she had mentioned to Chiffin—her jewellery, comprising her costly diamonds, and numerous other articles of value—had all disappeared!

We need not dwell at much greater length upon the sequel of this night's adventure. It is however necessary to record a few more particulars—and first to observe that Lord Saxondale's valet was compelled to return to his mistress and report (what indeed he had all along known) that his young master had not been in during the night. As the reader has doubtless anticipated, the burglars got clear off long before the alarm was raised: for Lady Saxondale had remained a considerable time in a state of stupefaction. Her account was, for she chose to say nothing about the essence in the bottle, —that she had sat up to read a very interesting book, when she was suddenly startled by the presence of two ill-looking men, from one of whom she received a blow with a bludgeon that struck her down senseless. Such being the version she rendered, she could not for consistency's sake give anything like a minute description of the personal appearance of the ruffians.

The searching investigation that was instituted throughout the house a few hours later, showed that several of the apartments had been entered and robbed of many articles of value; while the condition of the back door leading into the garden, indicated plainly enough the means by which the

burglars had obtained admittance. Information was of course at once given to the police; and two experienced "detectives" were speedily on the premises. The first glance which they gave at the back door enabled them to pronounce with confidence that it was no "put-up affair:" in other words, that none of the servants of the establishment were in league with the robbers, the entry having been effected by forcible means from without, and through no succour from within. Lady Saxondale was requested to give as minute a description as she could of the burglars: but all she deemed it prudent to say was that one appeared to be a rough-looking man with a shaggy coat and a white hat with a black band, and that the other was a thin squalid individual—beyond which she could give no more satisfactory details.

But this account, meagre though it seemed, was sufficient to put the detectives on the right scent with regard to one of the burglars, whom they both unhesitatingly pronounced to be Chiffin the Cannibal. With respect to the other, they could form no conjecture.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DR. FERNEY.

THE gentleman whose name stands at the head of this chapter, was one of the most eminent but at the same time one of the most eccentric physicians in London. He occupied a very large mansion in Conduit Street, Hanover Square: yet his household establishment was on a very limited scale. Indeed, he kept only four domestics, entertained very little company, and lived in the plainest and simplest manner. But he tenanted so large a habitation because he required ample space for a museum of curiosities which he had been collecting for more than twenty years, and which consisted of objects connected with the medical, surgical, and physiological sciences. Mummies from Egyptian pyramids—human relics dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii—corpses which he had obtained from the body-snatchers and had embalmed with his own hands—the skeletons of individuals who having died in the workhouses or hospitals, presented examples of extraordinary malformation—monster-children preserved in glass bottles—figures in wax-work representing the appearance and ravages of the most virulent diseases which afflict humanity,—in short, a host of objects of this class and character were gathered in a suite of chambers at Dr. Ferney's house.

To these rooms the domestics very seldom penetrated: for it was confidently reported that the house was haunted, and that the spirits of some of the deceased persons whose embalmed bodies or fleshless skeletons had found a place in the doctor's museum, were frequently seen gliding after dusk through those dismal and awe-striking chambers. Not even in the broad daylight would the housemaid venture alone into the museum to sweep away the dust: the female servants, when this duty was to be performed, invariably went two together, and all the time they were engaged in cleansing the place, they would keep in close companionship, as if this near contiguity could effectually guarantee them against the presence of apparitions.

And truly, the museum was no very cheerful spectacle for persons of weak nerves or timorous dispositions. The Egyptian mummies, in their manifold swathings, with their shrivelled countenances resembling baked leather, and standing upright in the coffin-like boxes with glass lids,—the modern corpses, embalmed by the doctor's own hand, wrapped in shrouds, and with their yellowish marble-looking faces, their dull, glassy eyes wide open, their teeth gleaming between the pale lips slightly apart, and having a somewhat life-like look, though hideous and ghastly, as *they* also stood upright in their tall narrow cells fronted with glass,—the skeletons with every bone perfect, and articulated all over, suspended against the walls in such a manner that they seemed to stand upright of their own accord,—the skulls that were ranged in rows upon the shelves and seemed to look down with their eyeless sockets and to grin in mockery with their lipless mouths,—the monsters and abortions preserved in glass-bottles of different sizes, some of these monsters being children with two heads to one body, others with one head to two bodies, and so forth,—then the waxen effigies large as life, and disposed in various attitudes, some as if reclining on sofas, others standing upright each with an arm ominously extended, and all displaying upon their fleshlike surfaces the appearance of some loathsome, ravaging, and corroding disease,—such an assemblage of horrible and ghastly objects was indeed but too well calculated to scare those persons who could not look upon them with a coldly scientific eye.

In addition to his museum, Dr. Ferney had a laboratory,—not however for alchemical purposes, he being no believer in the philosopher's stone or the elixir of life, but for purely chemical experiments and the legitimate objects of a true science. The doctor devoted a great deal of his time to the pursuits of his laboratory; and many curious discoveries did he make, and many valuable eliminations accomplish. Few of these, however, did he give forth to the world: he was a man who cared nothing for fame—devotion to his studies had rendered him somewhat misanthropic — and in pursuing these studies with such insatiate ardour, it was not to form for himself a grand reputation, nor to confer blessings upon his fellow-creatures by adding to the lights of science, but simply, and we might almost say selfishly, to gratify his own individual thirst for knowledge. In this respect he resembled the bookworm who pores over mystic volumes, ferrets out mouldering manuscripts, decyphers hieroglyphics, and devotes years and years to the rectification of some particular date or the clearing up of some dubious point in history, but who after all keeps his discoveries to himself, devours his learning in secret, revels in solitude upon the literary treasures which he thus amasses, and allows not the world at large to benefit by the results of his perseverance or to share in the fruits of his labours. Of precisely such a character was Dr. Ferney; and yet he had not been enabled so completely to conceal his light under a bushel, that none of its rays peeped forth. Some few of his discoveries had transpired in various ways: yet when he had seen them recorded in print, accompanied with high eulogiums upon himself, he

experienced no emotion of pleasure — no inward triumph—no feeling of satisfaction.

Nevertheless, such a man could not help becoming famous to a certain extent—though he himself sought not after fame. As a physician he grew eminent; and he was diligent in the exercise of his professional duties, not for the sake of reputation, but because he thereby acquired ample revenues. But wherefore did this man, so frugal in his habits, so humble in his domestic economy, so completely dissevered from every pursuit which the world calls *pleasure*, and with no family cares or claims to make him wish for riches,—wherefore, it will be asked, did such a man covet much gold? Because he expended large sums in the prosecution of his favourite avocations. He thought no more of giving a thousand guineas for a mummy, than a wealthy aristocrat would in purchasing a race-horse; and if he read in any foreign journal of some extraordinary object in natural history existing at such-and-such a place, he would instantaneously despatch a trusty agent to procure the same, no matter at what price. Thus, for instance, he had in his museum the skeleton of a Russian giant seven feet seven inches high, who had died a few years back in Siberia and whose remains the doctor had purchased of the man's relatives (through his trusty agent) for a considerable sum. He had also the body of a German dwarf, only two feet six inches high, and who had lived to a very advanced age: this corpse, which was preserved in spirits of wine, Dr. Ferney had also purchased of the deceased pigmy's friends at the time of his death. But it would be impossible to enumerate the various curiosities of this ghastly nature which Dr. Ferney had succeeded in procuring. Enough has however been said to enable the reader to form an idea of the perseverance with which he pursued the bent of his taste, and the large outlays which were needed to gratify it.

He was a man of about forty-five years of age; and from his earliest youth had given indications of this singularity of genius and disposition which with the lapse of years was destined to show such remarkable developments. Of middle stature—thin, pale, and with a countenance that in every line and lineament denoted deep thought and continuous study—Dr. Ferney was not one of those men who are calculated to win the female heart. Without being at all repulsive, he still was very far from prepossessing. He was unmarried; and of all beings in the world, seemed the most likely to continue so. Yet this man, of such strange tastes, such profound devotion to the mysteries of science, and of such misanthropic habits, had not only loved, but still cherished in the depths of his soul the image of her who many years back had made so indelible an impression on his mind. His love had not been reciprocated: years and years had elapsed since he had seen its object—and yet the passion remained deep and unextinguishable in his heart. No one knew that he had thus loved, save and except the being on whom that love had been bestowed: no one thought him capable of loving—and to this supposed incapacity was the circumstance of his unwedded condition assigned. Yet in the solitude of his own study—in the secrecy of his laboratory—and even in the mystic silence and loneliness of his museum, would the memory of his love come stealing upon his mind like a perfumed cloud over Araby's sandy dreariness; and the bright and beautiful image which had inspired the sentiment would rise up before his mental vision like a mihrage of enchanting delight amidst the trackless sands of the desert. His was a strange heart to cherish such a feeling: but it existed there nevertheless—a rose blooming on the side of a barren rock!

Such was Dr. Ferney, the eminent physician of Conduit Street.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening, and the doctor was seated in his study, poring over a volume on some abstruse subject, when his footman entered to announce that a lady requested an immediate interview. The physician inquired her name—for he was not accustomed to receive visits from females at that hour: but the domestic replied that the lady had said her name was of no consequence, as she was a stranger to Dr. Ferney, but that she entreated the favour of an audience if it were only for a few minutes. The physician accordingly bade the servant introduce the lady to the study; and the lacquey quitted the room for the purpose.

In a couple of minutes the man returned, escorting a lady closely veiled. The footman withdrew, shutting the door behind him; and the doctor placed a chair for the lady's accommodation. She was handsomely dressed, but in a manner which seemed to indicate a motive for disguise. The dark veil was folded thickly over her features, and she retained it with one of her hands in such a way as to keep it in its proper position, so as effectually to conceal her face. She was tall and of a finely developed figure; and though from her manner she appeared somewhat agitated and nervous, yet there was in her gait and gestures a certain dignity mingled with elegance that denoted the well-bred female.

Dr. Ferney knew not how it was, but a strange kind of trouble gradually stole over him—an instinctive feeling that there was some unknown link between himself and this lady who came so mysteriously—a vague and undefined presentiment that despite what she had said to his footman, she was not entirely a stranger to him. So powerfully did these feelings gain upon the physician, that he found himself unable to put such questions as might elicit the lady's object in visiting him; and the clouds which enveloped his presentiment slowly fading away, it seemed as if his comprehension grew clearer and that a ray of light was dawning in more brightly upon his soul. He trembled—his heart began to palpitate even with violence—and he experienced the mystic knowledge that behind the dark veil was a countenance which he had seen before and which had remained indelibly impressed upon his memory!

The shallow reasoner and the superficial observer may ridicule this idea of the physician entertaining such a presentient knowledge of who his visitant was, even before she had lifted her veil or given utterance to a word: but the fact is perfectly consistent with the natural course of things. For there *are* such mystic promptings of the mind, such strange and unaccountable foreshadowings, such truthful but inexplicable revealings; and the thoughtful portion of our readers will not dissent from the assertion. Has it not happened—aye, and

often too—that when a young man and a young woman have been introduced to each other for the first time, there has arisen immediately and at once in their soul the instinctive feeling that they were destined for each other?—and this recognition of the *ideal* that each had formed relative to a future partner for life, has been thus mutual and simultaneous. "'*Tis she!*" murmurs the secret voice in the soul of the man: "'*Tis he!*" simultaneously whispers a like mysterious voice in the soul of the female. And thenceforth their destiny is accomplished, even as it had been foreshadowed ere they had ever met. Again, when one man has been introduced for the first time to another, there has arisen in the secret depths of the heart a sudden feeling of liking or aversion between the two, and the conviction that they have been predestined to exercise a powerful influence for good or for evil upon each other. We might multiply such illustrations to an endless amount: they are facts beyond dispute—and whatever may be the nature of the mysterious essence which thus subsists between mind and mind, and whatever be the origin of those strange presentiments, their power cannot be denied. Analagous therewith was the presentient knowledge which on the present occasion made Dr. Ferney aware who his visitant must be, even before he had acquired any positive certitude upon the subject.

Doubtless the lady herself observed the trouble and agitation which thus came over the physician: for she at length broke silence by saying, "Is it possible that you already suspect who I am?"

"Ah, that voice!" ejaculated Dr. Ferney: and for nearly a minute he seemed overpowered by the emotions which those flute-like sounds excited still more strongly and vividly within him.

Slowly did the lady speak again; and now she said, "Yes, Dr. Ferney—I am that same Mrs. Smith who lodged with your mother nineteen years ago, and who—— But I need say no more to recall myself to your memory."

"No, no—for I had not forgotten you! it was impossible I could have forgotten you!" exclaimed the physician, with a singular vehemence. "Nineteen years have passed, you say? Yes—I know it—I have calculated those years with perhaps a greater exactitude than yourself. But pardon me," he observed, suddenly interrupting himself; "you must think that I am talking strangely?"

The lady did indeed think so: at all events she was astonished to hear him speak in those fervid accents, and give utterance to such words, the reason and meaning of which however she could not fail to understand. For at the far back date which had been mentioned—namely, nineteen years ago—she had been aware that Ferney loved her: she knew at the time that she was the object of his enthusiastic adoration: but she could not possibly suppose that this love of his had survived the lapse of time, and that at the expiration of so long a period she should hear him speak and behold him look in a manner which indicated that the flame of his passion had not been extinguished within him.

"You do not answer me," he said after a brief pause. "Is it possible that I have offended you?"

"No, no: how could you give me offence?" exclaimed the lady, now proffering him her right hand, but still retaining the veil carefully folded over her countenance with the left.

"Madam," said Dr. Ferney, as he took that proffered hand and pressed it in his own, which trembled violently, "I am rejoiced that I have not offended you. It is not my fault if I have thought of you often and often—yes, very, very often—during the long interval that has elapsed since last we met. *Then* I was young—and not wrinkled, nor emaciated, nor care-worn in looks, with hard study and unwearied pursuance of the lights of science, as I am *now!* So that you must find me much altered? Though not many years past the prime of life, yet am I prematurely old——But *you*," he suddenly exclaimed, "cannot be so much altered as I am? And yet you conceal your countenance! Wherefore do you remain thus closely veiled? But no matter. I see before me that countenance as I beheld it in the glory of its beauty nineteen years ago; and if on raising that veil you were to reveal a face as much marred by the ravages of time as mine is, yet should I not behold it as it may now appear, but as I first saw it and as my memory has treasured it up."

"Is it possible," murmured the lady, evidently agitated and bewildered, "that you have thus continued to think of me during this long interval of time?"

Dr. Ferney did not immediately answer the question; but after a long pause, which seemed to be filled with deep and mournful reflections, he said in a low voice, "I never loved any one save you!"

"And have you never once seen me—nor even fancied that you have seen me, since we parted at your mother's residence nineteen years ago?" asked the lady: and through the deep folds of the veil her eyes seemed to shine brightly as they were fixed with keenest scrutiny upon the countenance of the physician.

"No—not once," answered Dr. Ferney. "Do you reside in London? or have you occasionally visited the metropolis? But pardon me—I was wrong to ask those questions. From the past I am well aware that circumstances of mystery attend upon you—though heaven knows that sooner than breathe a word from my lips calculated to do you an injury, I would lay down my life to render you a service!"

"Generous-hearted man!" exclaimed the lady, once more proffering him her hand. "Little did I expect such a reception! Methought that my image must have long years ago passed out of your memory, and that though perhaps you might now and then think of *one* circumstance which you cannot very well have forgotten, yet that it was regarded as a mere straw floating upon the great ocean of the past, and without importance or power sufficient to add one single ripple to your pathway over the waters of life."

"Not so—not so," responded Dr. Ferney, as he pressed the lady's hand between both his own. "The feeling that I experienced for you when you dwelt so many years back beneath my mother's roof—that mother who is long since dead—has never faded away from my heart. I may tell you this now, because I am an old man and my words can have little influence upon you or your destinies."

"Dr. Ferney," was the lady's response, "after all the generous words you have spoken to me, and after declaring that you would rather lay down your life to do me service than breathe a word to do me an injury, it would be wrong—it would be ungrateful—were I to treat you with such mistrust as to retain my veil over my features. Besides—you say that my countenance is impressed upon your memory——"

"Yes—indelibly!" exclaimed the physician. "But it would be happiness which I had never dared anticipate to behold it once again."

The lady slowly raised her veil; and an expression of mingled delight, admiration, and surprise came upon the countenance of Dr. Ferney. So little had time changed the beauty of those splendid features that it appeared to him as if the lapse of nineteen years had not taken place—that it had been all a dream—and that he saw her now as he had been wont to see her when at his mother's residence. For that lapse of time, while maturing the beauty of this magnificent woman, had only seemed to add to the glory and the splendour of her loveliness. There was perhaps less of youthful softness in her looks—but the light of her eyes had not waned—the raven darkness of her hair had not paled nor lost its gloss—the richness of the red had not withered on the lips—nor the evenness of the flesh become indented with a single wrinkle.

"'Tis the same—the very same!" murmured the physician, in accents that were only just audible: then passing his hand over his eyes, he said, "Is it a dream—a delicious dream? or is it a reality? It is a reality! I cannot doubt it:"—and once more did he appear so overpowered by his emotions that he looked as if almost about to faint.

"And during this long interval," said the lady, repeating her former question with an evident anxiety to receive the confirmation of the former response, "you have never once seen me?"

"No—never once," returned the physician. "By the nature of the query I must of course suppose that you either dwell in London or visit it frequently: but even if you are constantly riding or walking abroad it would not be surprising that we have never met: for I go out so little—never into society—only to visit the patients who cannot come to me; and in those professional rounds I am whirled rapidly along in my carriage, for my time is so precious! Then, even when thus flying about in my carriage, my attention is ever fixed on some book which I take with me; so that seldom is it I gaze forth from the window of the vehicle—and thus, if every day you pass me by, I should not see you. But let me again beseech and implore that you will experience no mistrust in me. Good heavens! I am incapable of injuring you; and even if I were capable, I know not that I have the power. For with reference to that incident to which I need not allude more pointedly, I scarcely understood its meaning and purpose at the time, and assuredly I feel no inclination to fathom it now. Whatever mysteries be your's, keep them—cling to them—and rest confident that so far as I am concerned they are safe. You have conferred upon me too much happiness by thus permitting me to gaze upon that countenance again, not to inspire me with the liveliest gratitude in addition to any other sentiment I may have experienced towards you."

"And are you not surprised to receive a visit from me?" asked the lady.

"Yes—and yet not altogether surprised; for without being able to explain it even unto myself," continued the doctor, "I must inform you that there has often arisen in the depths of my soul a presentiment that we should one day meet again. But observe, this presentiment has not been accompanied by *hope*. I never was wildly enthusiastic nor drivellingly foolish enough to anticipate that the feeling which my heart has cherished would ever be crowned with happiness. Yet I felt, as I have said, that we should meet again; and I now rejoice that we have thus met. Such is the tone and temper of my mind that when you depart hence, no dreariness nor dismalness will be left behind you; but, on the contrary, the light of your transient presence will appear to linger within these walls and cheer me on my way. You see that I can speak rationally and calmly upon this subject, as becomes my years, and as becomes perhaps the position of her whom I am now addressing. For that you were not what you seemed when dwelling at my mother's residence, I felt assured; and that your's is no plebeian nor middle grade, I am equally confident now. But who you might have been I never sought to know; and who you are I purpose not to inquire at present. Those are your secrets—and they are sacred in my estimation. Besides, I have no undue curiosity; mine is a disposition of another stamp. But pardon this long speech. All I have said is merely to inspire you with the necessary confidence to induce you to explain the purpose of your visit: for that you have an object in coming to me this evening, I must of course conclude."

"Dr. Ferney, you are a man of too much sense,' replied the lady, "for me to dream of flattering or complimenting you so emptily—so transparently—as by a declaration to the effect that I came hither for the mere purpose of reviving the friendship of former days. No—it was a purely business-matter that brought me hither; and as I ere now said, little did I anticipate so kind, so generous a reception. I fancied that we should meet almost as strangers: but it has proved otherwise—and I have therefore the less difficulty in explaining my purpose. Do you recollect that when you had your little house in Islington—at a time when you could scarcely foresee the eminence to which you were destined to rise, and which has enabled you to move to this fashionable quarter of the town,—do you remember, I ask, that you had a little laboratory opening from your private sitting-room up-stairs?"

"When I removed from that house," replied Dr. Ferney, "it cost me many a pang to do so, because *you* had visited me there. Ah! can I forget that laboratory? do I not remember that one entire morning was passed with you there? and you seemed to take so deep an interest in the various experiments I showed you——Oh! it was that which emboldened me at the time to throw myself at your feet and declare how much I loved you!"

"And you remember also," continued the lady, "that there were two or three of your experiments in which I was so much interested that I besought you to give me written descriptions of the several processes—and you did so."

"And those receipts—have you preserved them? have you ever thought any more of them?" asked

Dr. Ferney, with a glow of pleasure upon his countenance.

"I have preserved them—I have amused myself on several occasions with the experiments themselves—and I can assure you," added the lady, with a sweet smile, "that I have fulfilled the instructions with a success that you yourself, as my preceptor in the science, would have viewed with satisfaction. Do you remember that one of those receipts was for a peculiar compound fluid which yourself had just succeeded in discovering?"

"Yes—and the discovery of which Liebig has just claimed as his own," added Dr. Ferney. "But no matter—the credit was mine, if any there were. You mean chloroform?"

"The same," answered the lady. "Well, I now come to the object of my present visit. A bottle of this subtle fluid has been stolen from me: it has fallen into the hands of persons whose desperate characters I have too much reason to know; and I dread lest the most fearful uses should be made of it. Therefore have I lost no time in coming to make you acquainted with this circumstance. For to tell you the truth, I feared that if such evil uses as I anticipate should be made of the fluid, and that you heard of any such case, you might at once, on the impulse of the moment, declare *that some years back you had communicated the secret to a lady, and that from her only could the dangerous elimination have been procured.* Under such circumstances I might become seriously compromised—for carelessness, at the least——for from what you told me at the time I thought it very improbable you would ever communicate the secret to another——"

"Ah! I recollect," exclaimed Dr. Ferney, "I said that inasmuch as you had taken so deep an interest in that discovery, it should remain sacred on your account; so that I might have the satisfaction of thinking to myself that there was at least one being in the world whose smile of approval had gladdened me in my scientific pursuits."

"It was because you spoke thus," rejoined the lady, "and because I read at the time the generosity and sincerity of your character, that I felt assured they were not idle words you had uttered. Therefore, when the phial of fluid was purloined from me last night, I said to myself, 'If it should really be the case that to me only in the world has Dr. Ferney entrusted his secret, I now stand a twofold risk. In the first place, should an evil use be made of the fluid by the hands into which it has fallen, and if he comes to hear of it, he may proclaim to the world that from a certain lady could the subtle essence alone have been obtained. Or else, in the second place, he will perhaps ascribe direct to me whatsoever crime may be perpetrated; and it would be terrible to suffer thus in the estimation of any one.'—These were the terms in which I reasoned to myself; and therefore, in anticipation of whatsoever may ensue from the loss of my phial of chloroform, I resolved upon paying you this visit."

"I am glad—I am rejoiced," replied the doctor, "that the incident has occurred, since it has procured me the happiness of your presence. But what would you have me do? in what way can I assist you? Speak—you can command me in all things."

"Should you hear of any case in which the villains who have stolen the fluid make an evil use of it, you will pass the matter over in silence—you will take no step that shall lead to farther investigations? Will you promise me this, doctor?" asked the lady.

"I will—most faithfully and most readily," replied the physician. "Is this all that you require? is this all that I can do?"

"I have nothing more to ask," rejoined the lady. "And now, Dr. Ferney," she said, rising from her seat, "I must take my leave. But one word!" she exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck her. "If perchance," she continued, in that winning way which women know so well how to adopt towards those over whose hearts their charms have power, "should we ever meet in the great world, it must be as simple acquaintances—almost as strangers, and not a word from your lips will suffer others to know under what circumstances we met long years ago—much less for what purpose!"

"Have I not already told you," asked the doctor, in a mildly and mournfully reproachful voice, "that I would sooner die than do you an injury. Relative to that purpose of which you speak, I have so far buried it in oblivion that it remains entombed at the bottom of my soul. Did the Inquisition exist now, and rear its hydra-head armed with all its terrors in the very heart of England, not even all the tortures of the rack should drag forth that secret from me. It is your's—not mine."

"Generous man that you are! accept my warmest, sincerest, most heartfelt thanks! And think not that though nineteen years have elapsed since last we met, I have been unmindful of your welfare. I have watched you from a distance—I have seen you rise to eminence—and I have been rejoiced. If I did not send you my congratulations, it was because——But no matter! I congratulate you now—and with a fervid sincerity."

"But you will not leave me thus abruptly?" said the physician. "You, who were interested in my little laboratory at Islington, will surely condescend to cast a look within the walls of the larger one which I possess in Conduit Street? And you remember too, that nucleus of a museum which I had formed, also in Islington—a small closet containing a few curiosities, with difficulty purchased by the hard savings of those times? Well, the little nucleus in the small closet has grown and expanded into a large collection, filling a suite of four chambers within these walls."

"Yes—I will with pleasure visit your laboratory and your museum," returned the lady, who was evidently anxious to render herself agreeable to the physician, as an additional inducement for him to keep inviolable the several secrets with which he appeared to be entrusted.

"Come then," said Ferney: and taking a lamp off his reading-desk, he led the way from the study.

Crossing a landing-place, the physician guided the lady along a passage to a door which he threw open; and she soon found herself in the laboratory. We need not pause to describe in detail the appearance of this place: the imagination of our readers can easily depict the shelves covered with jars and bottles duly labelled with the chemical hieroglyphics—the furnace in one corner—the alembics, retorts, and other implements which lay scattered about—the book-case containing several curious volumes—

and the table in the middle, crowded with phials filled with fluids of all colours and qualities, saucers containing crystals, and the other results of a wondrous science perseveringly pursued by one of its most ardent disciples.

The lady, after examining the various implements with great apparent interest and curiosity, turned towards the table, and inspecting the phials, asked several questions relative to their contents. Dr. Ferney, who for years had never been excited by any tribute of praise or any personal homage shown to his scientific genius, was now perfectly overjoyed at the interest which the lady seemed to take therein. But then he loved her—he had worshipped her image for those long, long years—and she was now present with him in the living reality! He explained to her one after another the natures and uses of the various fluids contained in the phials; and at length taking up one which she herself had not noticed, he said, "Here is a liquid of so deadly a poison, that I am even surprised at my own indiscretion in leaving it here. It is fortunate however that my servants possess no undue curiosity, and never penetrate to my private rooms without previous orders. Indeed, the foolish creatures declare that they are haunted," added the doctor with a smile.

"But this remarkable poison of which you began to speak," said the lady: "is it also a new discovery of yours?"

"It is an elimination which I succeeded in obtaining but yesterday," replied Dr. Ferney. "There is no poison so fatal in existence. It needs not even so much as a drop poured down the throat: the point of a feather dipped therein and placed with the gentlest touch upon the lip, would produce instantaneous death. The peculiar property of the fluid is that it is inodorous as it is likewise clear as water."

"And wherefore this deadly—this terrible discovery?" asked the lady: "what purpose can it serve?"

"Not that to which I may have seemed to allude," replied the physician, again smiling: for he experienced a rare happiness in the company of the object of his undying affection. "But by means of this fluid, used infinitesimally with large admixtures, I have no doubt of accomplishing some wondrous cures. Let us now pass on into the museum:"—and thus speaking, Dr. Ferney placed the little phial containing the deadly poison on the edge of the table.

He now took up the lamp once more, and was leading the way out of the laboratory, when there was a sudden crash and a sort of stifled shriek on the part of the lady. Dr. Ferney turned hastily round; and on perceiving what it was, he besought her not to vex herself on account of the accident.

"Oh, how awkward—how careless on my part!" she cried, with an air of the utmost annoyance. "It was the fringe of my shawl that swept all these phials from the table."

"No matter! no matter!" said the physician. "Pray do not blame yourself."

"But the fruits of your labours?" she exclaimed, looking down at the quantity of broken glass and the pool of liquid on the floor.

"Again I say no matter!" persisted the physician, who was annoyed only on the lady's account—for she appeared deeply vexed.

"But the phial containing the deadly poison?" she observed. "That, I fear, was amongst them."

"Still no matter!" rejoined Dr. Ferney. "It perhaps serves me right for leaving it about in so negligent a manner. Come and let me show you the wonders of my museum."

The lady accordingly followed him from the laboratory; and as she did so, she took the opportunity of thrusting into her bosom something which she had held in her hand.

They now ascended a flight of stairs; and on reaching the landing above, Dr. Ferney opened a door which led into the suite of apartments containing the various objects of physiological curiosity, anatomical preparation, and waxen effigy, to which we alluded at the opening of this chapter.

"Here," said the doctor, as he held the lamp before an array of skulls upon a shelf, "are the heads of many celebrated criminals, procured——no matter exactly how. To the lover of the phrenological science each head tells its own peculiar story, and without previous knowledge, affords a certain clue to the reading of the history of the individual to whom it belonged. The very crimes which the wretches perpetrated and for which they suffered, are distinctly evidenced by the construction of their skulls. Now, here," continued the doctor, carrying the lamp to the front of a mummy in its case, "is an Egyptian Princess dug out of the Pyramid of Cheops. This one next to it is the petrified form of a male slave found in a kitchen belonging to a palace in Herculaneum. It was dug out from amidst the lava, which had preserved instead of destroying it. See that iron chain upon the leg: it was the badge of servitude! Here, in this next case, is a corpse which, to tell you the truth, I procured from the resurrection-men several years ago. Ah! I used to be a good customer to them, when bodies could not be so easily obtained as they can now. This furnishes the result of an experiment of mine in embalming. See how admirably it is preserved! does it not seem as if the individual had only died yesterday? But while I think of embalming, I can show you another specimen. That also I procured from the body-snatchers; and, by the bye, it is just about nineteen years ago—shortly after our acquaintance in London ended and you quitted my mother's abode. Business called me into the country; and there I purchased this *subject* which I am about to show you. It seems he was drowned. He must have been a very fine young man; and I flatter myself that it is the most successful experiment I ever made in the process of embalming. Here, this way."

Thus speaking, Dr. Ferney led the lady into the adjacent room: and there, advancing close up to a tall coffin-looking case, which stood upright on one end, and with a glass front, he pointed to its inmate, saying, "This is the one."

The lady, though naturally of strong mind, had contemplated with some degree of cold horror the various objects hitherto pointed out: but, as already stated, it suited her purpose to manifest as much interest as she was able in the things that constituted the doctor's favourite studies. She now advanced up to this fresh object of curiosity to which Dr. Ferney had alluded: but what words can depict her horror, astonishment, and dismay, when she

thus found herself as it were face to face with Ralph Farefield?

For the doctor's visitress, as the reader has doubtless all along known, was none other than Lady Saxondale!

Yes—there stood Ralph Farefield, looking as if he had not been dead a day—apparelled, too, in a befitting suit of raiment; for thus was the doctor accustomed to clothe his *subjects*, so as to give them a life-like appearance. Yes—there was Ralph Farefield, gazing with his artificial eyes of glass, forth from his coffin-case, upon the horror-stricken Lady Saxondale. Fortunate for her was it that utter consternation paralyzed her voice and for the moment struck her dumb,—fortunate too was it that a massive table was near, against which she supported herself as she staggered back,— fortunate also was it that Dr. Ferney had his own eyes turned towards the corpse at the time: for had it not been for all these circumstances, Lady Saxondale would have screamed out—would have sunk down upon the floor - and would have betrayed the terrible emotions so suddenly excited by this tremendous discovery. And never, too, had her natural strength of mind been so abruptly called upon to put forth all its powers: never was the readiness of self-possession so completely needed! Nor was she at fault in these respects. She became herself all in a moment: but it was with a terrible effort that cost agonies in making it—and the coolness she assumed was unnatural to a degree.

"It is indeed wonderful, my dear Dr. Ferney," she observed. "Your success in the art of preserving these objects is beyond all parallel. Truly, you must have discovered the Egyptian secret: the lost key has been found by you. But, Ah!" she suddenly exclaimed, as a clock in the museum struck eleven,—a circumstance of which she was only too glad to avail herself as an excuse for immediate departure,—"is it possible that I have been here two whole hours? And now it is so late! The time has slipped away——how fast, how fast! My dear Dr. Ferney, I must say farewell at once."

"And may I hope," inquired the physician, "that on some future occasion you will favour me with your presence in my humble abode? But no—not for the world, unless perfectly agreeable to yourself——"

"Yes, doctor—I will assuredly visit you again. Meanwhile you will recollect the promise you have made me?"

"It were impossible to forget anything in connexion with you—and equally impossible not to keep any pledge which you have required."

Lady Saxondale was now escorted by Dr. Ferney out of the museum; and she appeared to breathe more freely when the door of that hideous place had closed behind her. Carefully covering her countenance with her veil again, she descended the stairs, preceded by the physician, who carried the light; and in the hall she bade him farewell. For a moment he felt the pressure of her hand as it held his own; and when she had departed, and the street-door was shut again, and the doctor was left to the solitude of his own thoughts, that pressure of the hand seemed to linger—it was still felt—and the music of the lady's voice likewise seemed to sound in his ears.

Strange was the love which this man felt for that woman whose real name he knew not and of whose station in life he was equally ignorant! But this love of his—was it an infatuation? No: it was rather a deep and holy devotion which his heart offered up eternally at the shrine of love. There was nothing maudlin in that love—no sickly sentimentalism against which common sense nauseates: it was not a love showing itself in caprices—passionate outbursts alternating with fits of despondency;—it was a love which ruffled not the even tenour of his way—it was an essence mingling with the waters on which his bark of life floated, and not a breeze sweeping over its surface. It was a love without grossness—without impurity—and the disappointment and hopelessness of which had been accompanied by a profound resignation. How strange, then, is the influence of love! but in how many varied ways does it manifest its power! Even the strong mind of that man—a man given up to philosophic study and scientific research—yielded to its influence: its etherealizing spirit commingled with the tide of his erudition—it interwove itself amidst the tissues of his learning—and ampler and ampler though the stores of knowledge grew in that man's soul, there was yet no infringement upon the space forming the tabernacle which enshrined his love.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LISTENERS.

On the following day, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, William Deveril knocked at the front-door of Saxondale House.

"Is her ladyship at home?" he inquired of the hall-porter; and while his face was very pale and even careworn, there was nevertheless a certain decisiveness in his looks and accents which indicated a firm and settled purpose.

"Her ladyship is at home, sir," was the porter's reply, given coldly though not insolently: "but I am sorry to say that I have orders not to admit you."

"Under most circumstances such an intimation," replied Deveril, "would be respected by any one of good manners and breeding: but there are also circumstances which justify an individual in demanding an audience and insisting upon his demand being complied with. Such are the circumstances in which I am placed."

"I am afraid I cannot help you, sir," said the hall porter, standing at the door in such a way as to be ready to bar Deveril's entrance, should he make the attempt.

"Do not pay me such an ill compliment," he observed, in a gentle though manly tone of rebuke, "as to suppose that I shall endeavour to force my way into the house. I am incapable of such conduct. But what I desire is, that you send up a message to Lady Saxondale to the effect that I demand an interview, not as a favour, but as a right."

"I will certainly send up a message," said the hall-porter: and no longer thinking it necessary to keep the door-way guarded, he turned round and directed a footman to report to her ladyship what Mr. Deveril had said.

In a few minutes the footman, who, very different

from the hall-porter, was an insolent, self-sufficient conceited puppy of a fellow, came rushing down the stairs; and shouting out, "Her ladyship says you are to be off,"—banged the door violently in Deveril's face.

Now, it happened that Juliana Farefield was in the dining-room opening from the hall at the time this scene took place; and as the door was only ajar she overheard everything that passed. As the reader is aware, she was previously incredulous relative to her mother's tale; and the step which Deveril had thus taken fully confirmed this incredulity on her part. The calm decisive manner in which Deveril had spoken, appeared to be stamped with a consciousness of his own innocence and of the foul wrong which he had received; and as Juliana was very far from wanting in shrewdness and good sense, the young gentleman's conduct could not fail to make a strong impression on her mind. Thinking that he would either return, or else take some other step in order to procure an explanation at Lady Saxondale's hands—and being curious to watch the result—Juliana determined to be on the look-out for the remainder of the afternoon. Being presently joined by her sister, she communicated to her what had happened; and Constance, who likewise possessed a large share of curiosity, now became equally anxious to see how the affair would progress.

An hour after Deveril's rude dismissal from the house, a very loud knock and a very imperious ring were given at the front door; and the moment the hall-porter opened it, a short stout gentleman, well but quaintly dressed, marched without ceremony into the hall. Having thus gained a footing inside the fortress, he seemed to consider it as good as taken: for he said in a tone of authority to the impudent puppy of a footman who at once accosted him, "Show me up-stairs to her ladyship."

This mode of address, coupled with the gentleman's air of confidence, at once produced the

desired effect: for as he gave no card, and walked in with so little ceremony, it was natural to suppose that he knew perfectly well what he was doing and was certain of being well received. The footman accordingly conducted him up the spacious staircase; and on reaching the landing, he said in the usual manner, "What name, sir, shall I announce?"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," was the reply.

"Mr. Gunthorpe!" vociferated the footman, as he threw open the door leading into the drawing-room where Lady Saxondale was seated.

Here we must interrupt the narrative for a moment to state that Juliana and Constance, being on the watch in the dining-room, had witnessed the arrival of the stout gentleman—had heard the imperious manner in which he addressed the footman—and had peeped forth to survey him with more attention than they had been enabled to bestow at the glimpse they caught of him from the window when ascending the front-door step.

"I do declare," whispered Juliana, "that he exactly answers the description given of that Mr. Gunthorpe whom Edmund described to us so ludicrously! The same scratch wig—the same overhanging chin—the same curious-fashioned garments——"

"Yes: but what can he want with mamma?" asked Constance.

"Let us see," responded Juliana. "I have a presentiment that his visit is in some way or another connected with Mr. Deveril."

The two young ladies quitted the dining-room—ascended the staircase—and stealing into an apartment adjoining that where Mr. Gunthorpe had just been introduced to Lady Saxondale's presence, they placed themselves at the door of communication between the two rooms. The door was shut: but it was easy to overhear in one apartment what was taking place in the other; and so the two Miss Farefields were enabled to gratify their curiosity to the utmost extent.

Let us now look on the other side of the door at which Juliana and Constance are listening.

Lady Saxondale, on hearing the name of Mr. Gunthorpe announced, recognized it at once as that of an individual whom she had overheard her son Edmund hold up to ridicule one day when he was in a lively and bantering mood; and certainly the appearance of this gentleman was sufficient to confirm in her ladyship's mind whatsoever amount of ludicrous impression her son's discourse concerning him had previously made. Not for an instant did it strike Lady Saxondale that he came about William Deveril's business; and feeling offended at the unceremonious way in which he had caused himself to be announced, she received him with the most freezing coldness. Mr. Gunthorpe was however the last person on the face of the earth to be discomfited by such a reception; and coolly taking a seat, though altogether unasked, he observed, "I dare say your ladyship is much surprised at this visit on the part of one who has obtained no formal introduction?"

"I presume, sir," returned Lady Saxondale, with an ice-like dignity, "that having some trifling knowledge of my son you have called to see him? But he is not at home at the present time——"

"I beg your ladyship to understand," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "that I should not take so unwarrantable a liberty as to presume upon my slight—very slight acquaintance with Lord Saxondale so far as to intrude myself upon the privacy of his mother. But my object is to have some serious conversation with your ladyship on behalf of a young gentleman in whom I am somewhat interested—I mean Mr. Deveril."

So unexpectedly was this announcement made, and therefore so totally unprepared was Lady Saxondale to preserve her presence of mind when that name appeared to be thrown at her like an accusation, that she gave a sudden start and looked confused. But the loss of fortitude could only be momentary with a woman of her strong mind; and therefore immediately recovering herself, she said, coldly and distantly as before, "Out of respect for your years, sir, I will listen to what you may have to say: but I cannot promise you to pardon the young man on whose behalf you are come."

"Pardon, my lady!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe with some little show of indignation. "It is not pardon that he seeks—it is justice. Pardon is to be sought by those who injure—not by those who are injured."

"The only interpretation I can put upon your words, sir," rejoined Lady Saxondale, with a voice and look of consummate assurance, "is to suppose that Mr. Deveril has given you some false version of his conduct towards me——"

"Or of your ladyship's conduct towards him? But no!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe: "he is incapable of speaking falsely."

"And I, sir," cried Lady Saxondale, her cheeks suffusing with a crimson glow and her eyes flashing fire,—"do you dare insinuate that I am capable of speaking falsely?"

"Madam," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, "it is always an unpleasant business to have to make accusations at all; but the task becomes doubly disagreeable when the accuser is one of the stronger sex, and the accused is one of the weaker. Such is the present case."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Saxondale, rising from her seat upon the sofa, "this interview cannot proceed farther."

"Madam," answered the old gentleman, "I am not a man to be diverted from my course by any overbearing conduct. I am not one of those who are dazzled by the false lustre of patrician rank. I know very well that meteors blaze at a distance, but when they fall down upon the earth they prove to be merely vile stones. So it is with the false gods and goddesses of the British aristocracy; and therefore I neither worship such idols nor can be intimidated by them."

"Mr. Gunthorpe, if you have come hither on purpose to insult me," said Lady Saxondale, resuming her seat upon the sofa, "I must submit: for it would grieve me much to be compelled to order my lacqueys to eject a gentleman of your respectable appearance and advanced years."

"I am confident that you do not even entertain the thought of such a thing, Lady Saxondale, as daring to bid a lacquey lay a hand upon me?"—and as Mr. Gunthorpe thus spoke, he looked her ladyship firmly and resolutely in the face, till, conscience-stricken, her own gaze cowered beneath his own. "Now, will you permit me without interruption to tell you a little anecdote, the object and purpose of which I will explain to you at the end? It is this:—A lady of proud title, a widow, who has

always borne in the presence of the world an untainted reputation, falls in love with a young man, much her inferior in what society has chosen to denominate rank. She is too much a slave to the artificialities and fictions of this same society to think of marrying the young man: but she has so little regard for decency, virtue, and real prudence, as to offer to become this young man's mistress. Yes—this she did in language glowing and warm; and she appeared to think that she had only to make the proposition in order to have it at once accepted. But this lady has grown up daughters, to whom the best and brightest example should be afforded: and yet in her foolish infatuation, and blinded by her passion, she offers to become the paramour of this young man whose personal beauty has aroused her desires. He rejects the proposal in terms of forbearing gentleness, but with loathing and abhorrence in his heart. Commiserating this lady who has so far forgotten herself in her unfortunate passion, he is even generous enough to promise the concealment of her folly—or shall I say her wickedness? But she menaces him with a terrible vengeance. He leaves her with sorrow in his heart that so much depravity can exist, masked by a beauty of the grandest and most lofty character; and he hopes that her repentance may enable him to throw the veil of secrecy over what has occurred. But conceive what his feelings must be when he discovers that this lady, too faithful to her threatened plan of vengeance, deliberately and purposely calls upon her acquaintances and friends in order to propagate a tale entirely to the prejudice of this young man."

Mr. Gunthorpe ceased speaking—but continued to look very hard at Lady Saxondale, from whose countenance indeed he had not once removed his eyes during the whole time he was delivering that lengthy address. He saw that notwithstanding her natural strength of mind and her proud assurance, she winced at his words—writhed under his narrative as he developed it—experienced an increasing confusion—and showed conscious guilt in every lineament of her countenance.

"Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, with a desperate effort to resume her self-possession, "it would be worse than childish for me to affect ignorance of the allusions you have been making. But, sir,"—and she felt her fortitude revive as she went on speaking,—"if you dare attribute such conduct to me—if you dare put such a version upon whatsoever passed between Mr. Deveril and myself—I must denounce you as a calumniator and must order you from my presence!"

"Be it as you will, madam," said the old gentleman, rising from his seat and taking up his broad-brimmed hat from the chair on which he had deposited it in companionship with his gold-headed cane. "But perhaps you are not aware of the course which it will be necessary to take under existing circumstances? Lady Saxondale, I am a rich man—and for no purpose would I sooner dispense a portion of my wealth than to procure justice for this Mr. William Deveril whom you have so cruelly and wantonly injured. Doubtless you thought, Lady Saxondale, that with your high position—your proud name—your lofty station—and, if need were, even with your gold—you might crush at your will that young man? But it shall not be so. He is not without friends: at all events he has one in me. And I now warn your ladyship that the tribunals shall be appealed to—an action for defamation of character shall be commenced against you——"

"Enough, sir—enough! I have already heard far too much," cried Lady Saxondale, starting up from her seat: for she saw that there was now no alternative but to meet the affair with a brazen effrontery—to take a bold and desperate stand—and to bid defiance to all menaces and to all hostile proceedings.

"One word more, madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, whose manner seemed to be invested with an authoritativeness irresistibly powerful, and which despite the resolve to which she had just come, exercised its influence over Lady Saxondale. "You possess two daughters—two grown-up daughters—young women indeed of a marriageable age, and for whom you are doubtless anxious to seek befitting alliances. Consider, madam, the demoralizing example which your conduct is but too well calculated to set them. Think you that if you push the present deplorable incident to the utmost extreme, nothing will transpire detrimental to yourself? Yes—believe me, all the world will put faith in William Deveril's story in preference to your own; and if the verdict of a jury should stamp you as a calumniatrix, it will by the same decision proclaim you to be nothing more than a demirep. Then, madam, what will become of your daughters? will their mother's evil reputation accelerate their chances of forming suitable and proper matrimonial connexions? And your son too, over whom, as I understand, your authority even at present is by no means well established,—will *he* regard the exposure of your gross passion for Deveril and your licentious overtures, as a reason why he should become more obedient? Think of all this, Lady Saxondale, ere you precipitate matters to an irrevocable extreme. At present you may privately repair the injury done to Deveril in those quarters where you have privately inflicted it. I know that it will be gall and wormwood for you to be compelled to recant your allegations, confess that they were calumnies, and give some explanation for your sudden hostility towards him; but ten thousand times worse will it be if in a court of justice all the details of the case are brought to light. Now, madam, for the last time, what is your decision?"

"I have nothing more to say, sir," responded Lady Saxondale, desperately clinging to the resolve she had already formed, and to meet all consequences with a brazen effrontery. "If I have listened to you so long, it is, I repeat, out of respect for your age——"

"No, Lady Saxondale," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, showing by his look that he could read to the depths of her heart as plainly as the eye can penetrate through a crystal streamlet to its pebbly bottom: "you have been influenced by no such generous motive. It is fear, Lady Saxondale—fear that has made you listen to me to the end——yes, *fear* I repeat, despite the powerful efforts which you have exerted and are still exerting to conquer the sentiment! But I will intrude no longer."

At this moment the door opened from the landing, and Lord Saxondale entered the room. He was lounging in with that fashionable affectation of lan-

guor and lassitude which seemed as if anything like an exertion were too much for his aristocratic constitution on a sultry day in the middle of summer, —when catching sight of Mr. Gunthorpe, he instantly burst into an ironical laugh, exclaiming in his cracked voice, "Ah! my worthy friend of the *Bell and Crown*, what on earth has brought you from the vulgar regions of the City? You must feel terribly out of place in our fashionable atmosphere."

Nothing could equal the look of mingled scorn and contempt which Mr. Gunthorpe bent upon Edmund Saxondale, as the latter delivered himself of those flippant impertinences. The old gentleman was at that instant neither comical nor common-looking: there was something exceedingly noble and dignified in his appearance, as if he felt in the depths of his own heart that instead of standing before a superior, it was he himself who was gazing down from a higher pedestal than the conceited young coxcomb could ever dream of occupying, no matter what advantages he might possess in respect to birth, rank, riches, and honours. Lady Saxondale herself, who possessed the nicest appreciation of everything that savoured of real dignity, was astonished at the superior look which Mr. Gunthorpe wore at that instant; and even Edmund was overawed by the old gentleman's appearance. His mind was not so completely perverted but he felt he deserved the overwhelming rebuke conveyed in Mr. Gunthorpe's indignant glances; and the rebuke too was more cutting and more searching a thousand times when thus conveyed than if it had been given in words. But still Edmund was not at all the young man to submit with a good grace to the castigation; and promptly recovering his habitual impertinence and self-sufficiency, he gave another affected laugh, exclaiming, "Well done, old fellow! you look just as you did that day when you blew up the cabman in Jermyn Street. You remember what I mean?"

"Madam," said Mr. Gunthorpe, turning his eyes towards Lady Saxondale and bending a significant look upon her, "I really pity you in the possession of such a son as this."

"You insolent old scoundrel!" ejaculated Edmund, becoming all in a moment livid with rage: and clenching his fist, he was about to rush toward the old gentleman, when the latter held up his gold-headed cane with a resoluteness that made the coward youth fall back.

"If you were to dare lay a finger on me, my lord," said Mr. Gunthorpe, calmly, "I would inflict that chastisement which you so richly deserve."

Thus speaking, he walked forth from the apartment, while Lady Saxondale pulled the bell violently. A couple of footmen instantaneously rushed to the room; and Lady Saxondale exclaimed, "Let that person be at once shown out of the house, and never admitted again!"

"Yes—and let him be kicked out!" screamed forth the infuriate Edmund, as he rushed out upon the landing, and looking over the staircase gave this vent to his impotent rage against Mr. Gunthorpe.

But the old gentleman descended the stairs as coolly and imperturbably as if he were merely retiring after having paid an ordinary visit of courtesy, —while the ferule of his cane tapped upon every one of the marble steps as he continued his way.

"What did that old fool want here?" demanded Lord Saxondale, as he sped back into the drawing-room, now intent upon venting his ill-humour upon his mother by seeking a quarrel with her.

"Rather let me ask," returned her ladyship, who was in precisely a similar mood towards her son, "how you dare insult a visitor whom you find with me, and thus lead to a scene which is calculated to scandalize the entire household?"

"I insult him indeed!" ejaculated Edmund, now flinging himself lazily upon the sofa, as if exhausted by the effort of even putting himself into a rage. "Why, I think you took it up pretty warmly too, by ringing the bell in that frantic manner and giving such orders to the servants. But I say, mother, what is this story that I hear running like wildfire all over London? Young William Deveril has been making love to you? Now you see what it is to have anything to do with such low fellows as these. I always disliked him, and was a deuced great mind to kick him out of the house."

But Lady Saxondale only threw a glance of sovereign contempt upon her son, as if she knew him to be a coward in his heart notwithstanding the ridiculous boast he had just made; and feeling the necessity of seeking the retirement of her own chamber in order to compose her agitated feelings and ponder well upon the particulars of her interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, she quitted the room.

Meanwhile Juliana and Constance had in the adjoining apartment overheard everything which had taken place. From the very first Juliana had never believed her mother's story respecting Deveril; and the result of Mr. Gunthorpe's visit was to confirm her opinion of its complete and utter falsity. To the same conclusion was Constance necessitated to arrive, though more slowly, with far less readiness to discredit her mother, and with feelings of regret to which Juliana was an entire stranger. Well indeed had Mr. Gunthorpe expatiated on the demoralizing effect of such an example set by a mother to her daughters; yet little did he think that the influence of this example was already felt—little did he imagine that even as he spoke his propetic words were receiving their fulfilment! And what was the picture presented to the contemplation of these young ladies? That their mother, having cast her affections upon an object whom the conventionalisms of society did not permit her to marry, even if he himself were inclined to espouse her, had offered to take him as a paramour—to throw herself into his arms as his mistress! For that Mr. Gunthorpe had only too faithfully recited what had really passed between their mother and Deveril, Juliana and Constance felt assured; and now therefore they had been brought to regard their own parent as a mere demirep in heart, wearing virtue as a mask, and concealing a real depravity beneath that exterior of severe hauteur and imposing dignity.

Whatsoever was impassioned in the temperaments of Juliana and Constance, was now rendered all the more glowing —especially in the case of the former, whose hot blood literally boiled in her veins. All the intent heat of her imagination was in a moment fanned into a blaze—a veil appeared to have fallen from her eyes—and she rushed to the conclusion that no women were really virtuous, but that all would seek the opportunity of gratifying their passions, trusting to conceal their frailty and their

guilt beneath the mask of hypocrisy. Even the comparatively pure mind of Constance caught the poisonous infection arising from the same source; and in the space of a brief half-hour those two sisters had become years older in the depravities of the imagination.

Oh, wretched wretched Lady Saxondale! if you could only have known how much of the evil seed which is naturally implanted in frail human nature had been all on a sudden made to shoot forth and germinate with fearful rapidity, even almost to the bearing of its kindred fruits, in the bosoms of your daughters, you would have shrunk appalled from the startling fact that it was your doing. For, Oh! the Medusa-head of a mother's bad example will paralyse and turn to rigid stone all the lively virtues and healthy qualities of her children. Woe unto thee. Lady Saxondale!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MIRROR.

About two hours later in the day, Juliana Farefield, dressed for dinner in a costume that set off her finely developed charms to the utmost advantage, was half reclining upon a sofa in one of the drawing-rooms, and whiling away the time with a volume of the last new novel. Little however of its contents did the lady's memory retain: for though she was reading of love there, she was thinking of love at the same time apart from the topic of the book. Her ideas seemed to flow in two distinct channels,—one following the course of the glowing descriptions of love as dressed up by the novelist—the other pursuing the raptures and blandishments of love as she herself felt and understood them.

There was a heightened colour upon her cheeks—a dewy moisture upon her rich red lips—a melting languor in her fine dark eyes—a languor the sensuousness of which was deepened by the half-closing of the lids, as if those eyes, faithfully reflecting the condition of the mind, were weighed down by the delicious thoughts that rested on her soul within. For the soul itself feels a kind of pleasurable oppressiveness and the weight of a softly sensuous languor when the imagination gives way to the rapt dreamings of love—even as the bee, which sips sweets from every flower, is oppressed by the burden of the delicious food wherewith it is laden,—or as the breezes of an oriental clime become heavy with the rich perfumes and odours which they have accumulated while they wandered kissingly over the brightest and fairest flowers of the earth.

Juliana was alone at the time in that room. Constance was in her own chamber, penning a response to a *billet* which she had received from the Marquis de Villebelle, through the agency of the faithful Mary-Anne. Lady Saxondale was likewise in her own room, pondering upon her unpleasant interview with Mr. Gunthorpe, and revolving a thousand wild and desperate plans in her mind for the purpose of arresting the hostile proceedings menaced by that gentleman on the part of William Deveril. As for Lord Saxondale, after having returned home for an hour or two just to see if there were any letters for him, he had gone back to the villa in the Seven Sisters' Road, laden with new presents and a fresh supply of costly gifts for the designing and fascinating Emily Archer.

Juliana therefore was alone in the drawing-room between five and six o'clock on that day of which we are writing; and what with the inspirations of the novel she was reading, the glowing character of her own thoughts, and the influence of those revelations which had come to her ears in respect to her mother, it was no wonder if she should at length fall into the following train of reflections:—

"Assuredly I should become the laughing-stock of the whole world," she said to herself, as she laid aside her book, "if I were to run away with Frank Paton and marry him. Yes, for no matter what the secret of his birth may really be, he is but a page after all; and if I wait till that mystery is cleared up with the hope that he may eventually prove to be the son of distinguished persons, I may wait long enough. Besides, how is it possible to wait? I feel that this passion is devouring me——Those, by the bye, are the very words which I have just now read in the novel! How truly some authors do depict our feelings! It was all very well for me to declare to Constance yesterday that I gloried in this love of mine, and that I should feel proud in becoming the wife of Francis Paton. Yes—but then I did not choose to acknowledge even to myself that there was any shame attached to this love—any reason to blush for it! It was an attempt to blazon forth something that nevertheless sat upon the heart like a remorse. Wherefore should I not imitate my mother's example? She would not marry William Deveril—but she——"

And then Juliana, not yet thoroughly depraved, checked the thought to which she was almost unconsciously giving expression in her musings; and returning to her book, she endeavoured to evade at least that portion of the ideas which had stolen upon her. But it was in vain: the idea was there—the seed had dropped upon a soil by no means unprepared to receive it—and although it might be covered up for a moment, it was nevertheless certain to take root—indeed all the more certain on that very account.

Presently the door opened, and Lady Saxondale entered the apartment. Juliana just lifted her eyes above her book to see who it was, and then went on reading without saying a word. In the same manner her ladyship glanced towards the sofa to see who was half reclining there; and likewise without speaking a word, she turned to the further extremity of the spacious room. There was a mutual feeling of embarrassment and mistrust on the part of the mother and the elder daughter. Lady Saxondale knew that her tale concerning Deveril had not been believed by Juliana; and her guilty conscience therefore made her think that the real truth of the transaction was suspected—for she was very far from entertaining an idea how completely it was known. On the other hand Juliana, being as yet young in the ways of duplicity and deceit, was always fearful lest her mother's eagle glance should detect her passion for the page; and now that somewhat unholy thoughts had arisen in the young lady's mind, her conscience suggested still more troubling fears than before. Thus was it that mistrust and suspicion subsisted between the patrician lady and her daughter.

Lady Saxondale retired, we said, to the farther

extremity of the apartment; and seating herself on a sofa, fell into a profound reverie. By a certain arrangement of drapery in the room, that sofa where Lady Saxondale had seated herself, was concealed from the view of Juliana; and for the same reason the latter, at the place where she lay half-reclined, was hidden from the eyes of her mother.

The young lady went on reading her book—ten minutes or a quarter of an hour elapsed—and as the love-passages of the tale grew more interesting, her attention became all the more completely absorbed in the perusal. The consequence was she altogether forgot the presence of her mother in the room—forgot it indeed as completely as if her ladyship were not there at all.

Presently the door opened again, and this time it was Frank Paton who entered. The beautiful youth appeared more beautiful than ever to the eyes of Juliana, inflamed as her imagination was at the moment, and thus keenly prone to enhance every detail of attraction and lineament of beauty. An electric thrill shot quiveringly through her—the colour heightened upon her cheeks—and fixing upon him as he approached a look brimful of passion, she half murmured, "Adorable boy, how I love you—Oh, how I love you."

He advanced close up to her, handing her a letter which had just arrived.

"Frank, dear Frank," she said in a low soft voice, as his eyes looked tenderly down into her's: and she patted his face with her hand.

He bent down towards her, invited by her gaze and her caresses to do so; and then their lips met in a long delicious kiss. At that instant the recollection flashed to Juliana's mind that Lady Saxondale was in the room; and full of affright was the glance which she threw towards the farther extremity. But the drapery hid her mother from her sight, and she experienced a feeling of indescribable relief at the reflection that she must in the same manner be concealed from her parent's view. Frank had noticed that sudden start—that quick glance of uneasiness—and the sudden disappearance of the carnation hue from her cheeks of delicately-tinted bistre; and instantaneously comprehending what all this meant, he likewise grew pale with affright. But Juliana gave him a reassuring tap on the cheek with her hand; so that the young page glided from the room more than ever in love if possible with the handsome Juliana.

This young lady then resumed her book; but instead of reading it, gave way to all the rapturous thoughts which the little scene just described had conjured up in her mind.

But every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Lady Saxondale—and in a very simple manner too: namely, the reflecting of the mirrors which embellished the walls of the apartment, and some of which, between the windows, descended to the floor. Yes—every detail of that scene had been witnessed by Juliana's mother! Not that she was watching her daughter at the time through the medium of the tell-tale mirrors: she was not even thinking of her: but it was in a mood of the most perfect abstraction that the eyes of Lady Saxondale were fixed upon the looking-glass opposite to her. Conceive her astonishment when she beheld the page bending over Juliana—the latter caressing his cheek with her hand,—yes, even to the looks of passion which her daughter rivetted on the handsome youth, did Lady Saxondale behold! But if there were any doubt in her mind—if for a moment she fancied there could be any mistake upon the subject—all uncertainty was cleared up by that long kiss of deliciousness and fervour in which the lips of Juliana and Francis were joined. Lady Saxondale sat perfectly aghast. It was impossible to disbelieve her eyes—and yet she still disbelieved the interpretation which she put upon what she saw. She believed and she disbelieved: all uncertainty was cleared up, and yet she dared not settle her mind upon the conviction thus established. But when the page had retired—when Juliana had resumed her book—when Lady Saxondale was compelled to admit to herself that what she had seen was true, and what had taken place was unmistakable, she felt such an awful feeling come over her that she sat like one petrified—turned into stone, with all the marble's terrible chill at her heart!

Good heavens! what a blow for the pride of the haughty Lady Saxondale! She who plumed herself so highly upon having prolonged the race into which she had married—the time-honoured race of Saxondale; she who regarded that name as one of the proudest chronicled in the pages of British history; she who had hoped that ere long some excellent match must present itself for her eldest daughter; she it was who now became compelled to admit to herself that this daughter had descended to amorous dalliance with a page. And in such a case it was no wonder if her ladyship abandoned herself to a belief in the worst: namely, that Juliana had been more culpable than she really was. At this thought the sense of petrifaction passed quickly away, and was instantaneously succeeded by a feeling as if molten lead had suddenly taken the place of blood in her veins—or as if that blood which a moment before seemed stagnant, had all in an instant been made to boil by the presence of some subtle but all-potent Promethean fire. There was a tingling sensation all over her; and her first impulse was to spring from her seat, rush forward, and tax Juliana with her supposed frailty and shame. But a second thought held her back. She remembered the increasing rebelliousness of her elder daughter's spirit; and she apprehended a scene which might lead to exposure before the household. Besides, if the evil were done it could not be repaired; and all the angry words in the world would not restore a lost virtue. Lady Saxondale therefore curbed her rage, bridled her indignation, and resolved to take no rash nor inconsiderate step. She must separate her daughter from the page: but even this she felt that it were impolitic to do all in a moment, lest Juliana in her wilfulness should leave the house with him, thus abandoning herself altogether to this passion of her's!

Terrible was the state of mind into which the unhappy woman was plunged. Calamities and cares of all kinds seemed gathering around her; and she appeared involved in the tangled web of a destiny that must terminate in ruin. But not long did her ladyship give way to these gloomy reflections: she was too strong-minded to become despondent or despairing on a sudden. She felt that she had need of all her energies in the various matters engaging her attention; and she said to herself, "It is absolutely necessary that I should be equal to

the task of meeting all difficulties and accomplishing all ends."

Lady Saxondale's musings were suddenly interrupted by the bursting open of the door nearest to where she sat,—for there were two doors to that spacious apartment;—and the housekeeper Mabel bounced into the room. By the agility of her movements she certainly appeared to have got well rid of her rheumatism; and if she had been eating the most peppery viands for dinner she could not possibly have been fired up with a greater degree of irritability than she displayed at present. We may even go so far as to state that she was in a boiling rage; and her red face, inflamed as it was with passion, looked like a perfect conflagration in contrast with the white cap with large frills that bordered this rubicund physiognomy.

"Mabel," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, starting from her seat in anticipation of a scene with her irate housekeeper; "what is the meaning of this abrupt intrusion?"

"Intrusion indeed!" screamed forth the woman whom this unfortunate word now appeared to excite almost to a positive frenzy: "everybody is bent on insulting me! But I will put up with it no longer. There is that jackanapes of a fellow who calls himself——"

"Mabel!" cried her ladyship, "take care what you say!"—and it was a strange look that she threw upon her housekeeper. "Tell me, what has my son been doing?"

"Doing? he is always doing something to vex and annoy me," was the response. "I never saw such a sneaking, cowardly fellow in all my life. He has been and told his valet that he will have me bundled out neck-and-crop just because I didn't stand aside and curtsey to him as he came down stairs this afternoon. But *you* know very well that he can't put his threat into execution—don't you, Lady Saxondale?"

"Mother," said Juliana, now rising from the sofa and advancing towards that part of the room where this scene was taking place, "I hope you will not believe everything that Mabel says against Edmund: for I must declare that a more insolent woman than this never had existence. She is constantly showing her airs to me and Constance; and all the servants of the household hate her."

"Oh! they do, do they?" shrieked forth Mabel, the sharp tones of her querulous voice ringing through the room: "then I will make them have something more to hate me for—and as for you, Miss, I snap my fingers at you."

"Mabel, Mabel!" cried Lady Saxondale, who appeared cruelly tortured by this scene; "I must insist——"

"Mother," interposed Juliana, "things have come to this pass in respect to Mabel that either you or she must show who is mistress here. For my part, I am resolved not to put up with her insolence any longer:"—and with these words Juliana walked out of the room, closing the door somewhat violently behind her.

"There! you see how I am treated!" cried the woman the instant she was alone with Lady Saxondale. "Everybody in the house thinks they have a right to insult me."

"Compose yourself, Mabel," said Lady Saxondale, with a look and accents of earnest entreaty. "It is useless for you to give way to these fits of rage——"

"Rage indeed!" she echoed. "Then why do they insult me—eh? Answer me that—answer me that!"

"I must say that you either imagine insults where none are intended, or else draw them down upon your own head. No one, Mabel, would travel out of their way to put a wanton and unmerited insult upon you."

"Ah! I suppose you are going to turn round upon me now. But you shan't though," cried Mabel, with threatening looks and gestures. "Recollect, Lady Saxondale, that with a single breath I could blow to the winds all this fabric of——"

"Hush, Mabel—hush, for God's sake! talk not so wildly—so rashly!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, as she flung a quick glance of apprehension around. "The very walls may have ears——But stay—let us come to some understanding. You are not happy beneath this roof; and over and over again I have offered to provide for you elsewhere. Why will you not retire to some comfortable little retreat, where, with a handsome allowance, you can be your own mistress and do exactly what you like?"

"Why don't I?" ejaculated Mabel: "for many reasons. In the first place, because I don't choose to be kicked off like an old shoe: in the second place because I am fond of authority, and therefore mean to keep my post of housekeeper here; and in the third place because I hate certain persons beneath this roof, and therefore enjoy the opportunity of showing my dislike."

These last words the woman spoke with a fiendish malignity which testified to the abhorrent nature of her disposition; and Lady Saxondale became deadly pale and trembled in every chord and fibre of her whole being as she listened.

"But, Mabel," she said, subduing her emotions as well as she could, "this is most unreasonable on your part. Do, for heaven's sake, have some consideration for me! What have I ever done to offend you? Have I not treated you with confidence—done all I could to make you happy——"

"Come, none of this stuff and nonsense, Lady Saxondale!" interrupted Mabel, who looked as if she were determined not to be appeased in any way. "I just tell you once for all that I mean my authority in this house to be second only to your's—that I will have that jackanapes of a fellow and that minx Juliana treat me with becoming respect. So you had better tell them to do so; or else I will have my revenge, no matter what are the consequences."

The woman had grasped the handle of the door as she thus spoke, and was about to fling out of the room, when Lady Saxondale made a motion for her to remain.

"Well—what is it?" demanded Mabel insolently.

"You must not—you really must not give way to these humours——"

"Humours indeed!"—and Mabel burst forth into another tirade, pretty well in the same strain as before.

While she was thus giving voluble vent to her perverse and malignant feelings, Lady Saxondale gradually grew grave and thoughtful. Some idea seemed to be expanding in her mind, and it was

evident this new thought was tending towards a desperate resolve. Mabel was still too much a prey to her irritated feelings to notice the ominous expression which Lady Saxondale's countenance had gradually assumed; and after giving vent to some more of her ill-humour, she abruptly withdrew.

"This matter is *also* coming to a crisis!" muttered Lady Saxondale to herself as the door closed behind the housekeeper. "Mabel is now the most dangerous of all those with whom I have to contend. But——"

And she stopped suddenly short, while the sinister lowering of her brows, the firm compression of her lips, and the decided air with which she turned towards the window, sufficiently indicated the adoption of some energetic resolve.

Soon afterwards a footman entered to announce that dinner was served up. Lady Saxondale accordingly descended to the dining-room, where Juliana and Constance had already met. The three ladies dined alone together that day: there was no company invited—and such a dinner was always held as the dullest thing in the world amongst people in high life. For the families of the aristocracy have seldom any resources of their own—while the frivolities and platitudes of fashionable life become wearisome to a degree, stale and flat beyond measure, when practised amongst themselves. Thus it is that they seldom dine without guests at their table. On the present occasion, therefore, the dinner-scene was tedious and insipid to a degree: but little conversation passed, and that was of a languid description. Nevertheless Lady Saxondale was the whole time watching Juliana's countenance, without appearing to take any unusual notice of her. She looked, with the keen eye of a mother, to probe the young lady's secret to the very uttermost, and ascertain if there were any indications to confirm her worst suspicion: but on this head she could gather nothing certain.

The cloth was removed and the dessert was upon the table, when Francis Paton entered the room; and accosting Lady Saxondale, bent down and whispered something in a low voice. Her ladyship gave an involuntary start, and even turned pale for a moment—all of which was observed by Juliana, though she appeared to be deeply occupied at the moment in cutting off the rind from a slice of pine-apple.

"Tell the person I will see her in a few minutes," said Lady Saxondale aloud.

Francis Paton bowed and withdrew; and her ladyship, who evidently remained only for the sake of not appearing to be flurried by the announcement she had received, affected to talk a little more blithely than she had ere now done. But in a few minutes she rose and quitted the room, intimating that she should return almost directly.

"I am convinced," said Juliana to Constance the moment the door closed behind their mother, "that the message she received was from the same old woman who called the night of the great dinner-party. I am certain it is. What would I give to discover her business! But I do not see how it is possible to go and listen at the parlour-door."

"No—do not risk it, dear Juliana," urged Constance. "To tell you the truth, I almost wish we had not listened to-day when Mr. Gunthorpe called. It is so shocking a thing to have one's confidence shaken in one's own mother!"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Juliana. "We are getting too old for such mawkish sentimentalism; and I for one mean in future to be my own mistress. But this woman ——I *must* go and ascertain if it be she."

With these words Juliana tripped forth from the dining-room which opened into the hall. On the opposite side was the parlour into which persons calling on any private business were usually shown; and it was in that parlour the young lady knew her mother to be now closetted with the woman whose arrival had been announced by Francis. No one was in the hall at the moment; and Juliana, unable to resist the opportunity and the temptation, approached the parlour-door. She heard a female voice speaking at the moment.

"But I insist upon it," said this voice, in a peremptory manner and with loud accents. "I insist upon it, I repeat."

"Hush! do not be so violent," immediately answered Lady Saxondale in an imploring tone, which sounded singular indeed when coming from her haughty lips. "How can I possibly do it? The police have got the matter in hand——"

"Yes: they have, and you have put them too much on the right scent," at once retorted the woman. "Chiffin—for that's the name of the principal one—is a man too useful to me at times to be parted with so easily——"

"But consider, my good woman," urged Lady Saxondale, "how extraordinary it will seem if I send for the officer who has this matter in hand, and tell him that I would rather put up with the loss of my property than have him proceed farther in the matter. I cannot do it: it would compromise me seriously. Ask what you will for yourself—I will give you more money——"

"No—I am bent on this, and *will* have it done," rejoined the woman, in a still more peremptory tone than before. "Don't thwart me, Lady Saxondale: or else——"

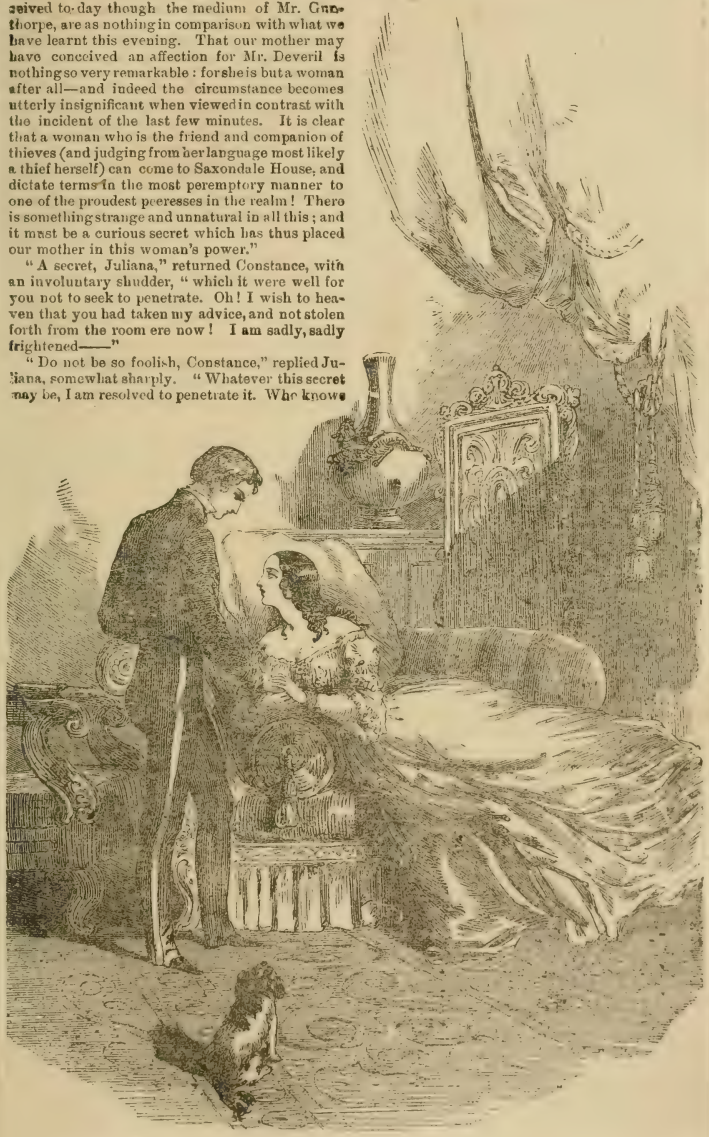
At this moment Juliana's ear caught the sounds of footsteps ascending the stairs from the servants' offices below; and she was compelled to make a precipitate retreat into the dining-room. Terribly annoyed she was at being thus disturbed in the middle of listening to a discourse so fraught with a strange wild interest, and of which she had just caught a sufficiency of the topic to excite her liveliest curiosity. The little she had heard she at once repeated to her sister; and Constance was astonished at the circumstance of any one possessing the power to dictate in such a way to her mother. Indeed, both the sisters were well nigh confounded at what had taken place. The object of the woman, even from the little which had been said, was apparent enough: namely, to compel Lady Saxondale to put a stop to the search which was being instituted by the police after the men who had broken into the house. Then this woman must be intimately connected with those men? She had indeed said so! Heavens! by what strange circumstance had such a woman acquired any power or influence over the haughty Lady Saxondale? Vain and bewildering conjectures!

"Constance," said Juliana, in a tone far more serious and grave than she was often wont to adopt, "I like this circumstance less than anything which has ever yet occurred. The revelations our ears re-

ceived to-day though the medium of Mr. Gunthorpe, are as nothing in comparison with what we have learnt this evening. That our mother may have conceived an affection for Mr. Deveril is nothing so very remarkable: for she is but a woman after all—and indeed the circumstance becomes utterly insignificant when viewed in contrast with the incident of the last few minutes. It is clear that a woman who is the friend and companion of thieves (and judging from her language most likely a thief herself) can come to Saxondale House, and dictate terms in the most peremptory manner to one of the proudest peeresses in the realm! There is something strange and unnatural in all this; and it must be a curious secret which has thus placed our mother in this woman's power."

"A secret, Juliana," returned Constance, with an involuntary shudder, "which it were well for you not to seek to penetrate. Oh! I wish to heaven that you had taken my advice, and not stolen forth from the room ere now! I am sadly, sadly frightened——"

"Do not be so foolish, Constance," replied Juliana, somewhat sharply. "Whatever this secret may be, I am resolved to penetrate it. Who knows



how serviceable the knowledge of it may prove to us?" she added significantly.

"Good heavens! in what sense?" asked Constance, gazing upon her sister with unfeigned surprise.

"Do you not catch my meaning? have we not secrets of our own? Well then, the more we know of our mother's secrets the less can she blame us for whatever she might happen to find out in respect to ourselves."

Constance looked pained and vexed at this answer; and after a pause of nearly a minute, she said in a low hesitating voice, "I think, Juliana, that even in the last words you have spoken, there is some hidden meaning which I did not exactly catch."

"My dear girl," replied the elder sister, "we are both in love and we are both peculiarly situated. If you marry the Marquis of Villebelle, you will be no wife in reality, inasmuch as he has a wife already: and if I marry Francis Paton, I become the laughing-stock of all the world. Now, therefore, under such circumstances, it would be by far better for us not to marry at all——"

"What! and renounce our love?" ejaculated Constance. "Oh! if you are so fickle, Juliana, it is widely different with me!"

"I am as far from holding the intention as you are of renouncing this passion of mine," responded Juliana. "I could not do it even if I wished: it is stronger than myself. But I again advise that we should not marry—and also that we keep our loves secret."

"And what do you mean, then?" asked Constance, with fluttering heart and changing colour: for she half suspected the response she would receive.

"Has not our dear mother," returned Juliana, with a laugh of ironical archness, "set us the example how to act? and did not Mr. Gunthorpe predict that we should profit by it? Now, my dear Constance, I have very little doubt in my own mind that Mr. Gunthorpe's prophecy will somehow or another receive its fulfilment."

"Enough, Juliana—enough!" cried Constance, whose soul retained a sufficiency of its virgin purity to recoil from the suggestions which her elder sister had thus thrown out, and with the indelicacy of which she was truly and sincerely shocked. "Oh, my dear Juliana! I beseech, I implore you, not to allow these thoughts to gain upon you."

"Can you deny, Constance, that you yourself have been somewhat changed by all you overheard this morning from Mr. Gunthorpe's lips in respect to our mother?" asked Juliana.

"No—I could not deny it," replied Constance, murmuringly: and it was with an evident reluctance that she looked inward for a moment to find in the depths of her soul the answer which she thus gave to her sister's question.

"Let us say no more upon the subject now," observed Juliana. "I have no doubt that by this time to-morrow you will have made some progress in your ideas. It has been so with me. Two or three hours back—before dinner—I also repudiated the thought which stole upon me; and now I can look it face to face, deliberately and calmly."

Silence then ensued between the sisters,—Constance falling into a deep and evidently painful reverie. In a few minutes Lady Saxondale returned to the room; and it was with no inconsiderable difficulty that her daughters could prevent themselves from regarding her with a fixedness and intensity of look that might have well excited her suspicion as to the eaves-dropping which had been practised by the elder one. Her ladyship was certainly pale, and there was a subdued trouble in her looks—a suppressed terror which could not altogether escape her daughters' notice. But they managed to preserve their countenances in such a way that Lady Saxondale entertained not the slightest suspicion that they had acquired any insight into the scene which had just taken place.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SNARE.

We must now return to Henrietta Leyden, whose mysterious disappearance had plunged her mother into such profound despair. The reader will remember that on the day when happiness seemed to have re-entered the dwelling of those who had known so much misfortune, Henrietta went forth between three and four o'clock in the afternoon to pay a visit to the Opera,—her object being to leave a note expressive of gratitude for Angela Vivaldi, and also to explain to the ballet-master the circumstances under which she was enabled to retire from a position which had never been to her taste. It will also be recollected that Henrietta was enabled, in consequence of the benevolence of Mr. Gunthorpe, to make a considerable improvement in her toilet; and thus was it that in a plain but pretty dress, a simple but becoming bonnet, and a neat shawl, the young damsel tripped gaily along the streets, she lightness of her heart giving a kindred elasticity to her steps.

Sweetly pretty then appeared Henrietta Leyden. Joy was dancing in her mild blue eyes; and instead of a soft melancholy upon her countenance, her features beamed with a light even bordering upon radiance. Then her figure was so admirably set off, in its slender but symmetrical proportions, by the neat and tasteful garb which she wore;—and beneath the skirt of her dress glancingly peeped forth those exquisitely shaped feet and beautifully turned ankles which had so well fitted her for the ballet-dance! Yes—full of happiness was now the heart of the young maiden; and she had forgotten the unpleasant impression made upon her mind by her mother's suspicions when she had returned in the middle of the night with Angela Vivaldi's gold in her hand. Still, notwithstanding the halo of happiness which surrounded her, Henrietta's demeanour retained that modest reserve and bashful timidity which belonged to the purity of her character; and though in her beauty there was attraction for the gaze of the libertine, yet in her manner there was no encouragement for his advances.

Henrietta reached the Opera, and entered the building as usual by the stage-door. To some official did she entrust her note for Signora Vivaldi; and she passed onward, through the labyrinthine corridors, to the stage in order to speak to the ballet-master. Three or four male loungers were

standing in the wings witnessing the evolutions of the half-dozen ballet-girls who were practising at the time upon the stage; but Henrietta threw not more than a passing glance upon those loungers —and hurrying timidly by, fearful of some familiarity or insult at their hands, entered on the back part of the stage.

In a few minutes the ballet-master observed the damsel; and beckoning her towards him, said in a somewhat angry manner, "How is it, Miss Leyden, that you were not here at three o'clock according to my directions? You know that you are yet very imperfect in the *pirouette*, and also——But I see," he suddenly interrupted himself, as he noticed the change in her apparel, "you are like the rest of them, I suppose, and have now got your head turned with fine garments."

"You wrong me, sir," replied Henrietta, the blood rushing to her cheeks. "I came to apologise for not being here at the hour named, and to explain that the same cause which prevented me from attending according to your directions, will enable me, I hope, to leave the stage for ever."

"And that cause?" said the ballet-master inquiringly, but neither superciliously nor insolently: for there was something in the young girl's manner, as well as a sincerity in her look and her accents, which made him hesitate ere he yielded to the belief that she had followed the usual course and accepted the overtures of some libertine lover.

"As I do not wish, sir," rejoined Henrietta, "to incur the evil suspicions of yourself or any one acquainted with me here, I am glad that you question me thus. Heaven has sent a kind friend to the succour of my poor invalid mother, my little brother, and myself."

"But who is this friend?" asked the ballet-master, his curiosity being excited.

"Oh! such a benevolent, kind-hearted, but eccentric old gentleman," returned Henrietta. "I do not know his name: but he is coming at six o'clock to conduct us all away from our present wretched abode to a more comfortable lodging. He has taken compassion upon us, and has already given the most generous proofs of his friendship."

There was the unsophisticated communicativeness of true gratitude on the part of the young girl, which allowed no scope for questioning her sincerity. She evidently experienced a pure and holy joy in thus dilating upon the bounties of which herself and those who were so dear to her had become the object. It would have been impossible for even the most suspicious individual, and one who put no confidence in the virtue of the female sex, to doubt the truth of Miss Leyden's artless narrative. The ballet-master, who certainly had little faith in the morals of opera-dancers generally, nevertheless believed every syllable which Henrietta spoke; and with a somewhat kinder tone than he had ever addressed her in before, he said, "I wish you well, and hope that everything will turn out for the best."

She thanked him for his good wishes; and having taken leave of him, stayed but a few minutes more to bid farewell to some of the ballet-dancers who accosted her, and who were curious to learn wherefore she was going to leave the Opera. She gave the same explanation she had just given to the ballet-master, and then hastened away.

Amongst those individuals whom we mentioned as lounging in the precincts of the stage, was one of whom it is necessary to say a few words. He was a man of about forty years of age—of sedate and even demure appearance—dressed in black, and looking thoroughly respectable. His white cravat and the absence of any shirt-collar gave him a certain air of sanctimoniousness: so that he seemed considerably out of place loitering in the wings of the Opera and gazing at the ballet-dancers.

This individual immediately recognized Henrietta Leyden, though she knew him not; and even if she had bestowed on him a more observing look as she passed him by, she would not have remembered ever to have seen him before. He however had seen her—knew full well who she was—and had his own reasons for being secretly rejoiced at encountering her there on the present occasion. He overheard every syllable which passed between herself and the ballet-master; and the circumstances of her simple narrative furnished him with a suggestion on which he at once resolved to act. Accordingly, while Henrietta lingered behind for the additional few minutes to converse with her late companions of the ballet, the individual of whom we have been speaking hurried away from the precincts of the stage; and threading the long winding corridors, emerged from the building by the stage door in the Haymarket.

There he waited till Henrietta Leyden made her appearance; and the moment she issued from the theatre, the individual in question accosted her with every appearance of anxious haste.

"You are Miss Leyden, I presume?" he said, in that quick tone and with that bustling manner which were full well calculated to throw her off her guard and make her at once fall into the snare which he was laying for her.

"Yes—that is my name," she answered, surveying him with mingled surprise and suspense.

"I thought so," he exclaimed. "You were so well described to me——"

"By whom?" she asked, her suspense now mingling with alarm lest something had happened at home.

"By him who has sent me hither—your benefactor—the old gentleman who visited your lodging just now, and who promised to return for you at six o'clock——"

"And he has sent you for me?" cried Henrietta. "Is there aught amiss?"

"No, nothing. Reassure yourself; be not alarmed. Everything is well. The explanation of my presence here is that your benefactor returned to your lodgings sooner than he intended, having an appointment for this evening which he had previously forgotten;—and he has taken your mother and brother away to the new place provided for you all."

"How kind! how generous!" ejaculated Henrietta. "But was he angry that I had gone out?"

"Angry—no! But as it is not necessary for you to return to your old lodging, he has sent me to escort you to your new one. Come quick, Miss: for I know that his time is precious and as I have to accompany him elsewhere, he will be waiting for me."

"I would not tax his patience for the world," said Henrietta.

During this rapid colloquy her companion had led her a little way up the street; and now he at

once summoned a vehicle from the public stand. With every appearance of haste he himself officiously opened the door ere the driver could jump down: Henrietta was promptly handed in—her companion gave some quick instructions, spoken aside, to the coachman—then he entered the vehicle—the door was closed—the man leapt up again to his box—and away they went.

All that we have described, from the first instant that the individual accosted Henrietta at the door of the Opera to that moment when she found herself seated by his side in the vehicle—had passed with such rapidity that she had not leisure for the slightest reflection. Her ideas had been kept in a whirl by the hurried, bustling, and almost anxiously impatient manner of her companion; so that there was not even a moment's leisure for a suspicion to start up in her mind. Nor for the first ten minutes during which the vehicle sped rapidly along, did her companion allow her time to give way to reflection; but he went on expatiating upon the philanthropy of her benefactor, the many charities which he practised, the vast amount of good he did, and the delight he took he succouring the unfortunate. The young damsel was naturally charmed at hearing such encomia lavished upon the old gentleman; but gradually the thought stole into her mind that her present companion had not once mentioned the said old gentleman's name. Then, for the first time during this interview, she began to regard with some degree of attention the person seated by her side. When however she saw how respectable was his appearance, how free from anything savouring of treachery were his looks—and with what respectful sympathy he appeared to regard her, she again felt perfectly reassured. Then she ventured to ask where her new abode was situated; and her companion at once informed her that it was in one of the most delightful suburbs of London—namely, near the village of Hornsey. Henrietta thereupon remarked that it was very considerate on the part of her generous benefactor to have chosen so salubrious a spot for her invalid mother; and this observation again furnished her companion with a topic for expatiation. In this manner he continued talking until the outskirts of London were reached on the northern side, and the vehicle was rolling along the road to Hornsey.

Now again did the young damsel begin to experience a revival of that vague misgiving which had previously arisen in her mind. Insensibly the idea stole upon her that her companion sustained so rapid and continuous a discourse in order to keep her attention engaged; and as this idea gained upon her, she could not help throwing at him dubious and uneasy looks. These however he did not appear to notice, but sought fresh topics for conversation; and though Henrietta had by this time ceased to answer him through the influence of her augmenting terrors, he still went on as volubly as ever.

Her alarm grew to an almost intolerable pitch. A secret voice whispered in the depths of her soul that all was not right: indeed she felt like one betrayed into a snare. Again did she glance at her companion; and now she thought there was something sinister beneath the sedateness of his looks. But what was she to do? Suppose that, after all, everything he had said was correct, how insulting would it be alike to him and her benefactor if she were to manifest the suspicions which were so rapidly acquiring strength in her bosom? Henrietta accordingly made up her mind to see the adventure to its issue, no matter what that result might be; and she even endeavoured to appear cheerful and gay, and to resume her part in the discourse, so as to prevent her companion from fathoming her uneasiness.

The village of Hornsey was reached; and the vehicle, turning into a diverging road, stopped at the gate of a large and handsome-looking house. It stood a little way back and was so embowered in tall and thickly umbrageous trees, that all its extent could not be immediately discerned: but when the gate was opened by a gardener who was at work on the premises, and the vehicle passed up the shady avenue to the portico in front of the house, Henrietta at once found herself at the entrance of a mansion. The poignancy of her suspicions now shot with a galvanic pang through her heart: but the very next instant an idea sprang up in her mind giving incalculable relief. What if the mansion really belonged to her benefactor, and that in the carrying out of his generous purposes he had resolved to afford her invalid mother, herself, and her little brother a home in this healthfully situated dwelling?

But she had not time for any farther reflection her companion had sprung out of the vehicle, and giving her his hand, assisted her also to alight. Painfully balanced between hope and fear—trembling to advance, yet not daring to retreat—Henrietta stood for a few moments on the steps of the portico; and then, making up her mind with a desperate effort, she suffered herself to be conducted into the mansion.

A servant in splendid livery held the front door open; and she found herself in a hall paved with marble and embellished with statues. A noble ascent of staircase faced the front entrance; and a side door which stood open revealed the interior of a sumptuously furnished parlour. In short, the very first glimpse which the damsel thus obtained of these features of the mansion, showed her that it was evidently the abode of wealth and luxury, and her heart sank within her. For now rushed the idea to her mind that it was by no means probable any man—and that man a complete stranger—would do so extraordinary generous a deed as to transfer herself and her relatives from a wretched attic to a palatial residence. It was a philanthropy belonging to romance and not to reality, such a change as one might read of in fairy tales, but not such as was wont to happen in the true world. All this occurred to Henrietta's mind in a moment; and she turned her terrified looks upon her companion. Now she thought she beheld a sardonic kind of smile blending indefinably with the sedateness of his countenance; and she felt inclined to cry out—but fear choked her utterance. At that instant a door facing the one which stood open, afforded egress to an individual whom she instantaneously recognized but too well; and all her terrors being confirmed in a moment, she gave vent to a wild shriek—burst from the hold of her companion—and sprang towards the front door. But the footman in the gorgeous livery banged it violently; and the dread conviction smote her heart that she was a prisoner!

Almost frantic—with frenzied look and reeling

brain—she turned round towards the individual whom she had recognized: but a sudden dizziness came over her—she staggered—mechanically extended her arms to clutch at something that might save her from falling—and was received in the embrace of Lord Everton!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEECH-TREE LODGE.

YES—it was a house belonging to Lord Everton to which Henrietta Leyden had thus been brought: he it was whom she had at once recognized as he issued from the apartment opening into the hall; and in his arms was it that she was received when consciousness abandoned her.

Let us pause for a few moments to give some necessary particulars. The individual who had entrapped the young damsel to Beech-Tree Lodge—for so the mansion was named—was a confidential person in the service of his lordship. His name was Bellamy—Mark Bellamy, as he was generally called by his patron. In certain respects he was treated with the familiarity of an equal, and was ostensibly the master of the house, as will hereafter be explained—though in reality it was Lord Everton's. Bellamy was a factotum—the ready instrument whereby Everton was enabled to carry out many of his dark unhallowed purposes; and being deep in his lordship's confidence, he was largely recompensed. Though not exactly a gentleman by birth, he had nevertheless received a tolerably good education, and was of manners sufficiently agreeable: in addition to which, he possessed the consummate art of adapting himself to all circumstances and persons, as occasion might require. Having seen much of the world, he possessed a large experience in all its vices, hypocrisies, and villanies; and beneath the mask of a demure sedateness, assisted by a sanctimonious style of apparel, he concealed a disposition of the most heartless kind and a character stained by countless iniquities. Some weeks previously to the time of which we are writing, Lord Everton had mentioned to him the name of Henrietta Leyden, and had promised him a handsome reward if he would by any possible treachery manage to inveigle that young girl to Beech-Tree Lodge. Everton was so good a paymaster, and especially so bounteous where the gratification of his detestable passons was concerned, that Mark Bellamy had resolved to seize an early opportunity of directing his attention to the matter. Having made himself acquainted with Henrietta's personal appearance, he determined to watch her movements, and had accordingly proceeded, that very day of which we are speaking, to the Opera House in the Haymarket, to glean whatsoever might be useful to him in the furtherance of his design. We have seen how, by a coincidence, the train of circumstances favoured his views. The tale which he overheard Henrietta tell the ballet-master, at once suggested to the fertile brain of Mark Bellamy a means of carrying out the enterprise; and he accomplished his purpose with success. As a matter of course he knew nothing of the Leydens' benefactor; and his elaborate expatiation upon that gentleman's virtues were indeed intended as Henrietta had surmised, to engross her attention and divert her thoughts from flowing into channels of suspicion and mistrust.

We may now pursue the thread of our story. When the unhappy girl came to herself, she found that she was reclining upon a sofa in that room whose sumptuous interior had caught her eyes when first entering the hall of the mansion. A middle-aged female, who had evidently been administering restoratives, was standing near. Henrietta threw a terrified look around, in the expectation of observing the detested old nobleman: but it was some relief to her distressed feelings to discover that she was alone in that room with the woman standing near her. A ray of hope flashed in upon her. Surely one of her own sex would not prove inaccessible to her entreaties for release? Inspired by the thought, she looked up into the woman's countenance to see if its aspect justified her hope: but this survey was only destined to experience the bitterest disappointment.

The woman was about six-and-forty years of age; and her features which had evidently once been exceedingly handsome, bore the marks of the insatiate passions which had furrowed those lineaments long before the hand of time could have begun to trace deep wrinkles there. Even to the innocent and inexperienced mind of the young maiden, that countenance betrayed the evil nature of the woman's heart: it was the scorched, seared, and ruined veil which instead of concealing, afforded an index to the desecration of the shrine within. Her hair was streaked with silver, but gave no venerable appearance to the face: on the contrary, it seemed a part of the remains of a beauty which even in the days of its glory had been fearful in itself, because associated with passions of the fiercest and most ungovernable nature. Her dark eyes still shone with a remnant of their former fires, but subdued to a lurid light, and at times bursting forth in sinister flashes, like the flame of a volcano seen through the pitchy darkness of a night of storm. Altogether she was a woman who appeared utterly incapable of one generous feeling—one holy idea—one tender sympathy: and it was in mingled horror and despair that poor Henrietta Leyden averted her looks and gave vent to her feelings in a sudden burst of anguish.

"Now understand me, my pretty dear," said the woman, in a voice which had that loss of harmony almost amounting to hoarseness which is so frequently the result of a dissipated life on the part of females,—"it is not of the slightest use for you to give way to any silly grief. Here you are—and here you will stop as long as it pleases his lordship: but I dare say that before long it will suit you well enough to remain here of your own accord."

"No—never, never!" shrieked forth Henrietta, as she sprang in wild frenzy from the sofa. "I would sooner perish than stoop to dishonour——"

"Dishonour indeed!" echoed the woman, her thin withered lips wreathing in supreme contempt mingled with scorn: "have you got that silly word so ready for use on the tip of your tongue? Know you not that it is mere idle cant to use it? Dishonour indeed! If there be dishonour at all in the world, it is only to be found attached to poverty; and it is from poverty that you may be lifted up if you choose. However, we will not talk more upon the subject at present. I dare say

that we shall have plenty of opportunities of expressing our opinions together on this and other points ere we separate."

"And is it really your intention," asked Henrietta, utterly reduced to despair by those last words which augured a long captivity for her, "to keep me a prisoner here in defiance of the law?"

"The law!" echoed the woman, with another scornful look, and this time it was accompanied by a still more sardonic laugh. "The law is only made to coerce the poor, and not to restrain the rich."

"Heavens! into whose power have I fallen!" cried Henrietta, wringing her hands in anguish as she sat down again on the sofa: for it really seemed to her as if a fiend in human shape, and not one of her own sex, were flinging these proud defiances alike at virtue and at legality.

"You have fallen into the hands of a nobleman who will ensure you against want for the rest of your days, and lavish all the advantages of wealth upon you," returned the woman, "provided that you willingly accept the destiny marked out for you. But if, on the other hand, you play the silly prude——However, I will not threaten you in respect to *that* alternative; because you have not been in the house as yet a quarter of an hour, and have passed through a fainting fit during that brief interval."

"Now listen to me," said Henrietta, suddenly wiping the tears from her eyes, and speaking with firmness and energy. "I have a mother who has been very, very ill, and whose health is still most precarious. My prolonged absence from her may be followed by fatal consequences. I have a little brother, only seven years old; and if anything should happen to my poor mother, who is to take care of him while I am in captivity here? I conjure you, if you have the slightest spark of feeling in your breast, to suffer me to go hence; and I declare solemnly that I will take no step to punish the authors of this outrage. But if you refuse this prayer which I offer up, I warn you that I will exert every effort to summon succour to my aid. My screams and shrieks shall pierce beyond these walls—there are other houses at no great distance—the passers-by in the road must likewise hear me ——Or if these means fail, then will I watch the first opportunity to precipitate myself from a window, no matter what height from the ground. In short, I am desperate! You may think me a weak and powerless young girl; but the maddening nature of my thoughts will inspire me with the strength and the courage of a giantess!"

"All this is remarkably fine, very heroic, and very romantic indeed," observed the woman, with the cold irony of disdain. "The only misfortune is that your appeal to my sympathy is as useless as if you addressed yourself to one of the statues in the hall; and the accomplishment of your threats will prove somewhat more difficult than you imagine."

"Good heavens!" cried the wretched Henrietta, "is it possible that any one in female shape can proclaim herself as heartless as the cold insensate marble? Woman, you must be a fiend—you must be a fiend!" she added, with an outburst of uncontrollable vehemence. "And as for what I have threatened to do, you cannot prevent me—no, you cannot prevent me! My screams shall raise the whole neighbourhood!"

With these words, uttered in wild frenzy, Henrietta sprang towards the nearest window: but she recoiled with a sudden horror on observing that it was well provided with iron bars. Her agonizing glance was flung towards the two other windows which belonged to the same room; and at each did she observe a similar grating. Just heaven! where was she? what prison was this? Reeling half round, with a frighful dizziness in her brain, the unhappy girl staggered to a seat, on which she sank down; and at the same moment the mocking laugh of that fiend-like woman rang in her ears.

"Now, Miss Leyden," said this dreadful creature, "do you begin to understand that your threats are all as ridiculous as your own silly prudery? There is not a window in the house which is not thus defended with iron bars; and therefore you will be spared the disagreeable alternative of self-destruction. As for your screams, you are quite welcome to open one of those windows and shriek forth till you lose your voice altogether. I can assure you that none of the neighbours will think of coming to your assistance. They will only wonder what poor maniac has been brought hither."

"A maniac!" echoed Henrietta, springing up from her seat as if galvanized with the light of the horrid truth which now flashed to her mind: "a maniac, did you say? What house then is this?"—and her voice sank to a subdued and awe-inspired lowness of tone as she put the question.

"I do not intend to be too communicative, my pretty dear," responded the woman: "but it may be that Mr. Bellamy—that is the gentleman who brought you hither—keeps a private lunatic asylum where he from time to time receives patients ——"

"Enough, enough!" interrupted Henrietta, hysterically; and again sinking down upon the seat, she covered her face with her hands, the tears gushing forth between her fingers.

"So you perceive," continued the woman, who appeared to take a devilish delight in making known to the young lady the utter hopelessness of her position, "that you will not be gratified with the facility of leaping from a window: nor will it be worth while to spoil your sweet voice by ineffectual screams. I would advise you to compose yourself—to make up your mind to the destiny which is inevitably yours; and whenever you think fit, I will conduct you to the apartments which you are to occupy. You need not hurry yourself, unless you like: I am in no hurry myself. Therefore, whether you come now or two or three hours hence, is not of the smallest consequence to me."

Henrietta pressed her fingers to her throbbing brows, and endeavoured to steady her thoughts. She saw the inutility of giving way to her anguish; and as the hope of escape was the only one which now remained to her, she thought that the sooner she made herself acquainted with the quarters to be assigned to her, the better. She accordingly wiped her eyes—struggled with a powerful effort to subdue the violence of her grief—and intimated to the woman that she was ready to accompany her.

"Just as you please," was the cold ironical answer: and she who gave it forthwith conducted the young captive out of the room.

They passed into the hall, and thence ascended that handsome flight of stairs already mentioned They reached a landing adorned with statues,

vases, and paintings, and whence three or four doors opened into the apartments on that storey.

But there they halted not: another ascent was mounted—another landing reached. Here the woman paused for a moment, and glanced along the array of four doors which appeared on that storey, as if she hesitated to which apartment she should assign the youthful prisoner. Her decision was however promptly made; and opening one of the doors, she conducted Henrietta into a suite of three rooms, beautifully furnished.

These rooms opened one into another, and had no visible issue except the door on the landing by which they had just entered. The first apartment was evidently fitted up as the one where meals might be taken: the next was to serve the purpose of a drawing-room: and the third was a bed-chamber. They all three had their windows at the back of the house; and these windows were barred. But the view therefrom was far more cheerful than that which the front of the house commanded: for these windows looked upon a beautiful garden in the rear of the building, stretching out to a considerable extent, and bounded by a shrubbery of evergreens, beyond which lay the green fields of the open country; and as all that neighbourhood is characterised by picturesque scenery, the view from the windows was altogether exceedingly beautiful. But what view can possess any charms for the captive who gazes upon it between iron bars?

"These are your apartments," said the woman. "In the cupboards and drawers of the bed-chamber you will find plenty of changes of raiment, some of which will fit you as exquisitely as if made by a milliner to your shape. The toilet-table affords all appropriate requirements In each room there are bell-pulls; and your summons will always be promptly answered. Your table shall be served with all dainties: everything shall be done to render you cheerful and contented, unless you resolve to be doggedly obstinate and perverse. In the middle room you may observe a number of books, some of which must doubtless suit your taste. When it strikes your fancy to take exercise, there is the garden at your service. All these pieces of information I give you by Lord Everton's command. There is no attempt to disguise from you the fact that you are a prisoner, at least for the present: but how long you may remain so, depends entirely upon yourself. You comprehend me? and therefore your destiny is thus far in your own hands, that whereas you are now a captive in this house, you may become the free and happy mistress of it whenever you think fit. I need say no more."

The woman had been permitted to make this long speech without the slightest interruption on Henrietta's part, because the young damsel was under the influence of too profound a terror—too paralysing a consternation, to be able to interject a single word or comment. She sat down in a dull dumb stupor,—her eyes fixed vacantly in the direction of the window, beyond the iron bars of which stretched the smiling country,—the verdure of the fields and trees all brilliant and glowing in the sunlight of the delicious summer evening. But Henrietta beheld not now that charming panorama of natural loveliness, dotted here and there with country mansions or picturesque cottages; the whole powers of her vision were turned inward, in concentrated survey of her own sad and well-nigh hopeless position.

The woman, perhaps imagining that the young captive had fallen into a fit of sullenness, turned slowly away, and passed out of the suite of rooms. As the outer door closed Henrietta started up and listened. It was to catch whether that door was locked or bolted upon her. Poor thing! as if those who had taken the trouble to put bars up at the windows would forget to secure the door of the cage to which the young fluttering bird was consigned! Yes: the sounds of the key turning and the bolts drawing, reached the damsel's ears; and then, with a sudden outburst of anguish, she wrung her hands violently, her bosom convulsing with sobs and her lips pouring forth the bitterest lamentations.

Oh! how dreary and dismal were the thoughts which now agitated in the brain of poor Henrietta. Would not her mother indeed have every apparent reason to suspect the worse,—she who was already so prone to suspicion! Crucifying reflection!—and heaven only knew how long a period was to elapse ere Henrietta would see her mother again, and be enabled to tell all that had occurred. And, alas! still more excruciating reflection!—was it destined that she should ultimately go forth pure and stainless from this mansion of infamy? or would not her ruin be assuredly consummated?

Unable to endure the torturing poignancy of these thoughts, Henrietta endeavoured to distract her attention by examining the apartments to which she had been consigned. She had another reason for entering on this survey: namely, to ascertain what chances there might be of a surprise on the part of Lord Everton during the night that was approaching The reader has doubtless well comprehended that it was a range of three rooms opening one into another, and entirely shut in from the rest of the house by the door that opened from the landing. She looked to see if there were any means of securing this door inside; and she found that there were. Yes: there was one of those little sliding bolts at the bottom part of the lock; and when this was secured, the door could not be opened from without save by violence, and therefore with a noise which could not fail to awaken her.

But was there no other means of communication with this suite of apartments? Minute and careful was Henrietta's scrutinizing search throughout the three rooms; but no other door save those between the apartments themselves, or of the cupboards in the bed-chamber, could she find. She examined the walls—likewise the wood-work inside the cupboards—looked under the bed and behind it—in short, left not a single nook or corner uninvestigated.

The result of this search was so far of an encouraging nature that she felt tolerably sure no attempt to surprise her in the night would be made; and indeed, when she reviewed all that the woman had said to her, she came to the conclusion that it was Lord Everton's hope either to weary or persuade her into a compliance with his wishes. If such were the case, it at least promised her some days' leisure to devise means for escape; and feeling that this was her only chance, she said to herself, "It is useless for me to give way to grief,—indeed worse than useless: for the

result must be the exhaustion of my physical powers and the prostration of my mental ones. Let me summon all my fortitude to my aid: for heaven only helps those who help themselves—and they who yield to despondency and despair, go half-way towards meeting the crowning calamity."

Strengthened by these reflections, Henrietta grew more calm. She surveyed the prospect from the window, and then turned to examine the contents of the book-shelves. There were novels, and poems, and travels, and some of the annuals, —in short, a miscellaneous collection of works, some of which were sufficiently suited to her taste. She took down a volume, and endeavoured to read; but her thoughts were not yet properly collected, nor her mind adequately tranquillized, for such employment. She therefore laid aside the book, and gazed forth again from the windows.

She heard the village-church of Hornsey proclaim the hour of seven: and then the outer door of her apartments was opened. A female servant made her appearance, bearing a tea-tray. Henrietta was greatly relieved on observing that it was not the same fearful-looking woman whom she had previously seen; but still there was nothing in the appearance of this servant to give her any hope of making her a friend. She was a thin, sharp-visaged, cross-looking woman, of about thirty—with that decided compression of the lips which seemed to imply that she thought it probable the young captive might appeal to her, but that she had a negative answer ready to give.

Henrietta did not therefore speak a word to this woman; but when she had retired the young damsel gladly partook of the refreshing beverage she had brought up. In half-an-hour the servant returned to take away the things; and she then said, "It was his lordship's intention to pay his respects to you this evening, but sudden business has compelled him to go into town, and therefore you will not see him till to-morrow."

"Does his lordship habitually live here?" asked Henrietta.

"No—of course not. I suppose you are aware that he has got a beautiful house in Belgrave Square."

"I know nothing of his lordship's circumstances," said Henrietta. "Pray who is the person who brought me up to these rooms?"

"Oh! the housekeeper, you mean," rejoined the servant, with a peculiar expression of countenance as she spoke. "You may call her Mrs. Martin when you want to address her by name; and, for my part, I answer to the name of Susan. Your's, I believe, is Miss Leyden?"

"Yes," replied Henrietta; then after a pause she asked, though somewhat hesitatingly. "Are there many people in this house? I mean any others besides myself—in the same position——"

Susan looked very hard at Henrietta for a few moments, as if to fathom her reason for asking this question; and then she abruptly replied, "No—none." There was another brief pause; and then she asked, "At what time do you like to have supper? and have you any particular orders to give about it?"

"I shall require nothing more this evening," responded Henrietta.

The woman took up the tea-tray and issued from the room, locking and bolting the door behind her

Two more hours passed, tediously and anxiously enough: for Henrietta could not help keeping her thoughts constantly rivetted upon her mother and brother, who must be so cruelly afflicted at her absence. And then her benefactor, too,—that old gentleman with whose name she herself was unacquainted,—what would he think of her disappearance? Would he still carry out his benevolent plans in respect to providing a new lodging for her invalid mother and little Charlie? or would he look with so much suspicion on her mysterious disappearance as to abandon in disgust any farther development of his charity in that quarter?

We need not however dwell any longer upon poor Henrietta's reflections: the reader can be at no loss to imagine what she felt or endured in the first hours of her captivity.

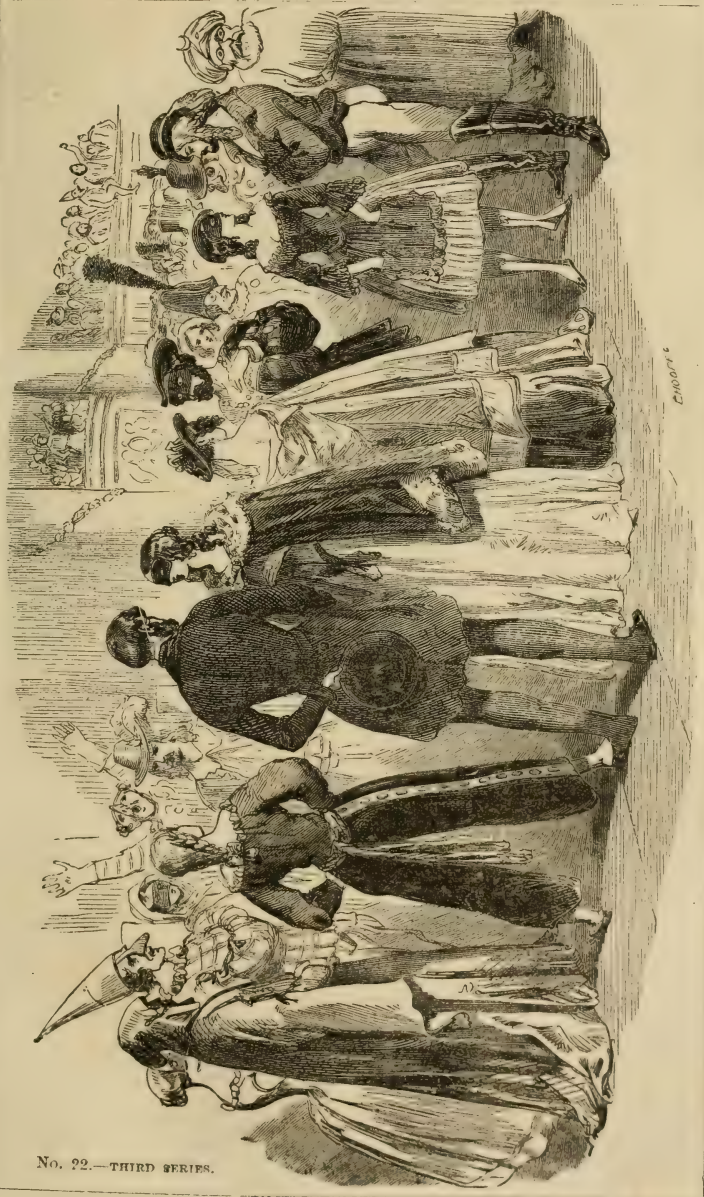
At nine o'clock, when the dusk set in, Susan made her appearance with candles, and also with a tray covered with sandwiches, cakes, fruits, and wine,—intimating "that Mrs. Martin had ordered her to bring up these refreshments in case Miss Leyden might choose to partake of them." She then asked if she required anything more; and on receiving a reply in the negative, wished Henrietta good night and departed.

The young damsel now secured the door by means of the sliding bolt above referred to; and as an additional precaution she placed a chair slantwise against the lock. When the clock of Hornsey church struck ten, she resolved to retire for the night; she was thoroughly exhausted in mind and body, and was moreover anxious to seek refuge from her unpleasant reflections in the oblivion of slumber. The door of communication between the dining-room and drawing-room was furnished with a key—and she therefore locked it. In the same manner did she secure the door between the drawing-room and the bed-chamber; and thus she felt convinced that her rest could not possibly be disturbed by any stealthy intrusion. Having laid aside her apparel and said her prayers, Henrietta sought her couch, where notwithstanding the bitterness of her thoughts, sleep soon fell upon her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MYSTERIOUS OCCURRENCES.

How long she had slept she knew not: but she awoke suddenly and with a feeling of terror, as if pursued by the influence of some unpleasant dream—or else startled by some noise in the room —she could not tell which. She had extinguished the candle ere retiring to rest: but the night being clear and beautiful, and the windows draped only with muslin curtains, all objects were perfectly visible in the room. Her eyes were cast around with that feeling of terror in the midst of which she had awakened: but she beheld nothing to justify her alarms. Still that terror was upon her—positive and real in its painful sensation—but vague and undefined as to its cause. The perspiration was standing out in large drops upon her forehead; and she felt the cold tremor of consternation all over her. Then she strove to recollect what she had



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been dreaming of: but she could not remember that she had been dreaming at all. She lay perfectly still, unable to move a limb, and with all the sensations of having experienced some alarm, either in a vision or by the unknown circumstance that had thus startlingly awakened her.

Perhaps five minutes might have elapsed while she was in this state of consternation; and then she heard a strange rustling of clothes in the room. Yes—she distinctly heard it; and the flesh crept upon her bones—her hair stood up by the roots—the perspiration broke out again, cold and clammy upon her. But now all was silent once more. What could it be? Suspense grew intolerable—and yet she dared not spring from the bed to search if any one were in the room. For another minute a solemn silence lasted; and then she again heard the rustling of garments, and distinctly beheld one of the half-drawn curtains at the foot of the bed slowly pulled back. Her eyes were rivetted in awful terror upon the spot; and then she perceived a human shape appear in the opening between the curtains. She endeavoured to shriek out—but her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth: she could not avert her eyes even if she had wished to do so. The shape was that of a man enveloped in a dressing-gown gathered by a cord at the waist; but for the first few moments Henrietta could not see his face clearly in consequence of the shade of the curtains. Slowly however he bent forward; and then his countenance was revealed—but, Oh! a countenance so ghastly pale, so sad and mournful in its look, that the young damsel felt convinced it was some apparition from the other world that was thus gazing upon her. She gave one gasping moan of ineffable horror—and her senses abandoned her.

When she awoke again, the sun was shining—the room was filled with light—the birds were singing in the trees of the garden—and everything seemed cheerful and gay. The horrible and mysterious incident of the night arose in her memory; and shudderingly she flung her looks around with the dread of again beholding that unearthly figure. But she saw nothing to terrify her. She sat up in bed—gazed more searchingly about—and gathering courage, descended from the couch. Still she saw nothing to revive her terrors. She glanced towards the door—it was shut; and a closer examination showed her that it was locked as she had left it. Now she began to suspect that what she had beheld was merely in a dream; and yet she was slow and hesitating in her progress to such a conclusion, inasmuch as every detail of the occurrence was so vividly impressed upon her mind. She remembered having been awakened—remembered also the terror she had then experienced, as if from the instinctive knowledge that there was something dreadful in the room even before it had looked in upon her between the curtains. She remembered likewise its shape, and that sad pale face which had bent forward towards her.

But was it not possible that though she might have awakened in terror under the influence of some unpleasant dream, she had gone to sleep again and had then in another dream, or in continuation of the former one, seen the figure which was so impressed upon her memory? *This* was indeed the only rational solution of the mystery: for however deeply her superstitious terrors might have been aroused in the solemn silence and semi-obscurity of the night, Henrietta was by no means inclined to put faith in apparitions now that the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and nature seemed so gay and cheerful without. She never had believed in spirits—she could not now: but if it were not a spirit, it could scarcely have been a living figure, because there was not the slightest indication of how it could have obtained ingress to the room, or have effected its egress. The door was locked, and there seemed no other door save those of the cupboards in the chamber.

Henrietta passed into the drawing-room, and found the door at the farther extremity likewise locked as she had left it. She proceeded on into the dining-room, and found the outer door also as she had left it. The sliding-bolt was fast, and the chair was slant-wise against the lock.

"Then assuredly it was a dream!" said Henrietta to herself. "But how singular a dream—impressed with all the vividness of reality! No wonder is it if weak-minded persons, after such a dream as this, should entertain the ineradicable conviction they have seen spirits from the other world!"

But even while thus coming to the conclusion that it was naught save a dream, Henrietta Leyden experienced a lingering doubt—a latent uncertainty, in the depth of her soul. There was moreover a depression of spirits, altogether apart from the influence of the thoughts excited by her captive position. Her nerves had been shaken, and on returning to her bed-chamber to perform her toilet, she found herself every now and then looking anxiously around with the apprehension of seeing that shape, with its pale and melancholy countenance, standing behind her. She examined the bed-curtains; and though it certainly struck her that one at the foot of the couch had been drawn back somewhat more than it was when she retired to rest, yet she could not be positive on this point.

Having dressed herself, she removed the chair from the outer door of her suite of apartments; and soon afterwards Susan made her appearance with the breakfast-tray. The table was speedily spread with a most tempting repast, if the poor girl had experienced any appetite for the viands thus served up: but a cup of tea and a piece of bread-and-butter were all the sustenance she could take. She longed to communicate to Susan the incident of the past night: she not only felt that it would be a relief to unbosom herself in that respect, but she likewise experienced a secret anxiety to ascertain whether the woman could help her in accounting for the occurrence in a natural way, otherwise than by attributing it to a dream—in short, if it were possible that any one could have intruded into her chamber. But when she looked at the forbidding countenance of the servant, and remarked the decisive compression of her lips, her entire air repelling any advances towards friendly or familiar intercourse,—the poor girl was constrained to hold her peace and ponder the matter in her own mind.

After breakfast Mrs. Martin ascended to Henrietta's rooms. The young damsel recoiled with an ill-concealed aversion from the presence of this woman, whom, although she knew nothing of her, she could not help associating with everything vile and depraved. Indeed, such was the impression that Mrs. Martin's looks were but too well calcu-

ated to leave upon the mind; and Henrietta would much rather have remained in the companionship of her own thoughts than have the society of this woman forced upon her.

"I am come to ascertain whether you have found everything comfortable, and also to inquire into your present frame of mind:"—and as Mrs. Martin thus spoke, she fixed her searching eyes earnestly upon the young captive.

"You may surround me with all the riches of the universe," was the reply; "but they would give me no comfort in my present position. As for the state of my mind, it is not to be comprehended by one who has admitted herself to be inaccessible to sympathy as a marble statue."

"At all events, your spirit is not broken, Miss," said the woman, with that same biting irony which she had displayed on the preceding evening.

Henrietta gave no answer: she did not choose to be drawn into a war of words nor an altercation with Mrs. Martin.

"I am sorry to see that you are alike obstinate and perverse," resumed this woman: "but such a humour will in no respect tend to your tranquillity. Lord Everton will be here by mid-day: he will see you then—and I should advise you to treat him kindly."

"Infamous woman!" ejaculated Henrietta, her cheeks becoming crimson and her eyes flashing fire, —those eyes that were wont to beam with so mild and serene a light. "It is impossible not to comprehend the detestable meaning which is clothed in your words. If you yourself are utterly callous to all ideas of virtue, at least do not think so ill of your sex as to imagine that *all* are equally infamous."

"These are harsh words, young woman," said Mrs. Martin, as she bit her nether lip, and her eyes for a moment glared fiercely upon the young captive: then suddenly conquering her excitement, she said, "Am I to understand then that you do not choose to be on friendly terms with me?"

Henrietta flung a glance of disgust at the woman, and then said, "If you purpose to remain here, be so kind as to decide in which of the three rooms you choose to sit."

"So that you may seek another?" was Mrs. Martin's bitterly uttered response. "But no—it is not my purpose to force my society upon you. Perhaps the time will come when you yourself will seek it. For mark me, Henrietta Leyden! a prisoner are you here to remain so long as you refuse the overtures of Lord Everton; and when the days hang wearisomely long upon your hands, you will welcome my presence with gladness."

"Never!" was Henrietta's emphatic response.

The woman threw upon her a mocking glance, and then took her departure, locking and bolting the door behind her.

In nervous suspense did Henrietta await the threatened visit from Lord Everton; and when she heard the clock of Hornsey church proclaim the hour of noon, her excitement rose to a pitch that was almost intolerable. She could not settle her mind to the adoption of any particular course. At one instant she resolved to overwhelm him with reproaches—at another to throw herself at his feet and beseech him to restore her to liberty. Then she thought that she would do well to array herself in the garb of hypocrisy, and by holding out hopes of eventual surrender throw him off his guard and obtain relaxations of her imprisonment which might furnish an opportunity of escape. But against this project the purity of her soul revolted: she could not bring herself to play such a game of duplicity, —and moreover, on second thoughts, she doubted whether it would succeed with one so wary and experienced in all degrees of cunning as Lord Everton.

Thus, when that nobleman made his appearance shortly after mid-day, Henrietta was in that nervous agitated state which left her altogether undecided in what manner to receive the author of her present sufferings. His lordship has already been described to the reader as an old man of about sixty-five, made up with all succedaneous contrivances and with all the artifices of the toilet, so as to wear a youthful appearance. Not only was he one of the richest but also one of the most depraved and profligate members of the aristocracy; and a long career of crime, practised with impunity, had rendered him bold and daring in adopting the means to gratify his passions. For this sole purpose indeed did he seem to exist,—regarding wealth only as the instrument whereby the aim was to be accomplished, and not as a something whereby he might benefit his fellow-creatures. We will not pause now to state the circumstances under which he had become possessed of the title that he desecrated and the riches that he prostituted. Suffice it to say that there were some strange tales told concerning him at the time he became Lord Everton: but having once succeeded in grasping rank and fortune, he, with characteristic shamelessness, defied the world and laughed at what it said of him. We may however observe here that he was a widower and childless, and that there was no heir to his title or estates. For this he cared nothing; he had no ambition to perpetuate his name, being utterly indifferent as to what might happen in the world when once death should have called him away from it. He lived, thought, and acted solely for himself: he was selfishness personified!

Such was the detestable character who now entered the drawing-room of Henrietta's apartments, with a smirking self-sufficient look, a jaunty air, and a debonnair gait. Henrietta had frequently seen him at the Opera, where she had been persecuted by his overtures; and then she had thought him exceedingly ugly: but now she regarded him as a hideous monster—something to be loathed as well as execrated—something to be shrunk from as well as viewed with mingled indignation and terror. For the farther insight which she had obtained into the iniquity of his character since the first moment she set foot in Beech-Tree Lodge, had even the effect of enhancing his physical ugliness in her estimation.

"My dear Henrietta," he began, with a tone and manner half of cajolery and half of assurance, "I am given to understand that you are not very well disposed towards me——"

"My lord," interrupted the damsel, "you have snatched me away from a mother whose invalid state demands all my care, and from a little brother who will be desolate without me. How can I possibly think of such an outrage without execrating the author of it—and perhaps in time burning to avenge it?"

"The word *revenge*, my dear girl," replied Everton, totally unabashed by the maiden's answer, "should not be breathed by lips that were formed only to talk of love. However, if such be your mood, I must leave you in it for the present. At the same time I may as well give you something to reflect upon, and relative to which I should like an early decision. Be mine, Henrietta, and your mother and brother shall be nobly provided for; while to yourself I will guarantee an annuity of five hundred a year for the remainder of your life."

"Have then my decision at once, Lord Everton!" exclaimed the girl proudly and indignantly. "My mother would sooner starve—I would sooner starve—and we would both sooner see a son and a brother starve, than obtain wealth on such terms. I know that I am powerless here, and that I am a prisoner: I know even that you yourself are wicked enough to attempt any outrage, and that you are surrounded by those who will only too faithfully give you their succour. But depend upon it, my lord, the day of retribution will come. It may be that long impunity has made you bold and daring, and that the unfulfilled threats of former victims prompt you to laugh at mine. But yet it were a blasphemy against heaven to believe that good fortune will always attend upon crime, and a libel upon my sex to suppose that there never shall be one with spirit enough to avenge her wrongs. Now, my lord, I have nothing more to say."

Having thus spoken, with mingled excitement and firmness, Henrietta quitted the room and passed into the bed-chamber, the door of which she locked. For two hours did she remain there without coming forth, not knowing whether her persecutor had quitted the adjoining apartment or not. At length some one knocked at the door; and on inquiring who it was, Henrietta recognized Susan's voice in reply.

"Your dinner is served up, Miss," said the servant-woman.

The young captive was about to ask whether Lord Everton was still there; but instantaneously reflecting that if it suited Susan's purpose to answer her falsely, she would do so, she said nothing but issued forth from the bed-chamber. Lord Everton was no longer in the drawing-room, and as Henrietta entered the dining-room, she became assured that she was free from his persecutions—at least for the present. But how long would this tranquillity last? She had given him her decision in reply to his proposals; and it was not likely he would ask her to reconsider them. No: there was every reason, on the contrary, to apprehend that his conduct would next be in accordance with his unscrupulous character, and that he would either use some diabolic artifice or else force to accomplish his designs.

Such were Henrietta's reflections; and fearful lest some soporific might be introduced into the food served up on the dinner-table, she made her repast off dry bread and pure water. The board was spread with all imaginable dainties, sufficient in quantity for a party of a dozen, and of quality to tempt the appetite of the most indifferent: but none of all those did the damsel touch. Susan said a few words to induce her to partake of the delicacies: but Henrietta gave no reply—and her meal being speedily ended, she retired into the next room.

For the remainder of the day she saw nothing more of either Lord Everton or Mrs. Martin; and so far from being encouraged by this circumstance, she regarded it as a sure omen that her worst anticipations would be confirmed. It was evident—at least to her comprehension—that no more persuasion or cajolery of words would be had recourse to—no more tempting offers made—but that stratagem or violence would be the means next employed.

Her tea was served up in the evening: then at nine o'clock a tray of refreshments, the same as on the preceding night, was brought in; and Susan, having inquired whether Miss Leyden wished for anything more, took her departure on receiving a reply in the negative. Henrietta, with a sad tightening at the heart, now began to make preparations for her defence ere she sought her bed-chamber. She bolted the outer door—she placed a chair slantwise against it—and then she pushed the table, which was heavy, up against the chair as an additional precaution. With the candle in her hand, she looked carefully about to assure herself that no one was concealed in the rooms; and she secured all the doors as she had done on the previous night. Now therefore, behold her once again locked up in the bed-chamber, where she likewise instituted the most rigorous search. But no one was secreted any where; and she felt assured that there was no means of reaching her chamber except by previously passing through the two other rooms. Those were so well secured that an entry could only be effected by violence; and if this took place, the noise would be certain to arouse her.

The clock of Hornsey church was striking ten as the poor girl sat down in her bed-chamber to reflect upon her position. The tears trickled like diamonds down her cheeks as she thought of what must be her mother's anguish and little Charley's grief at her absence and her silence. Vainly did she endeavour to tranquillize herself—she could not: her mental agony became almost maddening—she felt as if frenzy were fastening upon her brain. But at length the tears flowed more quickly—they gushed forth in a torrent—the pent-up sobs which surcharged her bosom, found an issue—and when the outpouring of her anguish was over, she felt considerably relieved.

Now she thought of retiring to rest: but gradually into her mind stole the recollection of the incident which had so terrified her during the past night—and a superstitious awe which she could not shake off, came over her. To tell the truth, she was afraid to seek her couch. Still more than half believing that what had so much alarmed her was nothing more than a dream, yet she did not altogether believe it was so: and her mind, attenuated by grief, was all the more susceptible of the influence of terror. Persons of the strongest nature have known a position like this, in which on the one hand their good sense tells them that their fears might be accounted for by natural means, while on the other hand those fears themselves will not be thus reasoned away. Such was Henrietta's condition—and she dared not commence disapparelling herself.

There was a large easy chair in the room; and she thought that at all events she would not immediately go to bed, but would recline herself in this. She placed it in such a manner with its back towards the window that she could command, as she sat in

it, a view of the door, the bed, and the cupboards. Poor girl! with her substantial terrors lest her persecutor should obtain admittance into her chamber, were blended her superstitious fears lest that shape with its pale, sorrowful face should again appear before her!

She reclined in the large arm-chair,—the candle, which stood upon the chest of drawers, showing forth every object in the room. We need not any farther attempt to analyze the reflections which engaged her mind: suffice it to say that she sat thinking—dismally, drearily thinking—until the clock of the village-church struck eleven, and soon afterwards she fell into a doze. She slept for about an hour, when she slowly wakened up as the clock was proclaiming the hour of midnight. But it was not an immediate and sudden awaking as on the previous night: it was the gradual arousing from the lethargy of slumber, with a heaviness upon the eyes and a cloudy confusion of the brain.

For a moment she scarcely recollected where she was: but as consciousness became more distinct, she opened her eyes wider. The candle was still a-light, but burning dimly—for the flame seemed to be struggling around an immense length of wick. It was a sort of mystic gloom rather than a clear light which filled the chamber; for the night without was starless and clouded. Gradually a cold tremor came upon Henrietta as she thought she beheld something standing in the deep shade of the curtains at the foot of the bed. Wildly she strained her eyes at the same instant that *something* moved: it came forward—and now, to her indescribable horror, she recognized that same shape she had seen on the previous night!

Again did she endeavour to cry out—and again was the power of utterance choked. Every limb grew rigid—the blood appeared to freeze in her veins—every function of life stood still. And yet her mind had a horrible clearness; and her eyes too faithfully fulfilled the power of vision. She beheld that shape approach:—it was a tall gaunt figure, thin and lank, wrapped around with a dark garment resembling a dressing-gown, and confined at the waist by a string or cord. But the countenance—Oh! the countenance which gazed upon her—surely it did indeed belong unto the dead! No tint of vital colouring had it—but colourless and corpse-like was it. The eyes were fixed upon her with a glassy stare; and the expression of the face was that of solemn sadness—a deep and mournful gravity—yet fixed and rigid as the look of the dead ever is.

This shape advanced to within a few feet of where Henrietta, half-leaning forward in awful horror, sat gazing upon it. Slowly it raised its hand—its lips appeared to move—and then so overpowering was the consternation which lay like a weight of lead upon the unhappy girl, that she fell back insensible.

When she awoke again the candle was still burning; and no one was there. The shape, whatever it were, had disappeared: Henrietta was alone. For some minutes she sat utterly unable to move, and pondering awfully and solemnly upon what had taken place. Then, obedient to an impulse which suddenly prompted her, she fell upon her knees and breathed a prayer invoking heaven's protection.

Strengthened by her devotions, she rose; and trimming the candle, made it give forth a clear light. She no longer felt any excitement in her mind, but a deep and solemn awe sitting upon her soul: nor was she even frightened now. She knew that she had done no harm—her conscience was pure—and if the grave really gave up its dead, surely it could not be to do her an injury? Taking up the candle, she carefully examined the room: but everything was precisely in the same order as ere she had fallen asleep. She sat down again, and reflected in a deliberate manner—without nervousness, without excitement. That this recurrence of the mysterious visitation was no dream, she felt convinced: she knew that what she had seen was with her eyes wide open in full wakefulness, and not with her mental vision and in the depth of slumber. The only question that remained therefore was to decide whether it was an apparition from another world, or a mortal denizen of this? Henrietta dared not think the former—yet scarcely knew how to believe the latter. For, admitting the last named hypothesis, how could the individual possibly have obtained ingress to her chamber? wherefore had he affected the solemn gravity of a ghost? why had he come to frighten her instead of speaking to her? Could it be a trick on the part of Lord Everton and his myrmidons in order to enfeeble her mind, shatter her energies, and reduce her to a state in which she might the more easily become the vile nobleman's victim? No: not for a single instant could it be held probable that this was the solution of the mystery; for completely in Lord Everton's power as she was, such trickery was altogether unnecessary. In short, she knew not what to think or which conjecture to adopt as the most rational.

As she sat in the arm-chair giving way to her reflections, sleep gradually stole upon her; and at length she fell into a profound slumber.

When she opened her eyes again it was broad daylight, and the sun was shining. She began to revolve in her mind the transaction of the past night; and though she still remained convinced that it was not a dream, she was still as far off as ever from discovering any solution for the mystery. She was ill through not having taken her proper night's rest—her spirits were deeply despondent—and she felt that two or three more days and nights passed in the same manner would throw her altogether upon a sick bed. Somewhat refreshed however by her ablutions, Henrietta issued forth from her chamber, and found the drawing and dining rooms just as she had left them over-night. She removed the chair and table from the outer door; and soon afterwards Susan made her appearance with the breakfast things. The tea was most welcome to Henrietta: but she had no appetite for substantial food. Having partaken of the beverage, she opened one of the windows and wooed the breeze to her throbbing brows and heated cheeks. Then she longed to descend into the garden and walk amidst the parterres of flowers, or in the shrubbery at the end. She was about to express her wish to the servant—for she really felt as if the monotony of those rooms would drive her mad—but she checked herself with the reflection that by doing so she would be giving some evidence of a gradual reconcilement to her captive state. But then she thought again, that if she could obtain a view of the back part of

the premises it might possibly suggest a means of escape. She accordingly said, "I feel so unwell through having passed two bad nights, that exercise and fresh air become absolutely necessary; and the person whom you call Mrs. Martin told me I might walk in the garden if I chose."

"Yes, with Mrs. Martin herself to accompany you," returned Susan.

"Be it so then," answered Miss Leyden after a moment's hesitation: for she decided that it would be better to view the premises even though it were requisite for the purpose to endure the presence of the most odious and detestable woman she had ever met in her life.

"Then follow me," said the servant: and Henrietta, hastily putting on her bonnet, proceeded down stairs in company with Susan.

The latter summoned Mrs. Martin from one of the rooms opening out of the hall; and this woman conducted Henrietta along a passage terminating in a green-house filled with beautiful plants, and whence a flight of steps led down to the garden.

"You appear pale and ill, Miss Leyden," said Mrs. Martin, fixing her sinister-looking eyes earnestly upon her.

"I have no reason to seem cheerful or well," was the response. "Indeed I have passed two very bad nights——"

"But you were not disturbed by any noise?" demanded the woman quickly. "You heard nothing strange—unusual——"

Henrietta, struck by the peculiarity of Mrs. Martin's tone, turned her eyes upon her, and noticed the earnestness of her gaze. It instantaneously occurred to her that there was something in this: and she accordingly said, "I certainly was disturbed in the night—*each* night," she added emphatically.

"Indeed — you were disturbed? But how?" exclaimed the woman in a kind of alarm.

"If there be anything in the house that could disturb me, you are doubtless aware of its existence," answered Henrietta, determined to see what course the conversation would take if left to her companion to direct it.

Mrs. Martin looked in a strangely suspicious manner at Henrietta, but made no immediate remark. They walked on in silence until they reached the extremity of the garden; and then, as they turned to retrace their steps, Mrs. Martin said, "It is quite probable that you may have heard some unpleasant noise in the house—and yet it is strange that I did not overhear it."

These last words she uttered rather in a musing tone to herself, yet audible enough for Henrietta to hear. The young damsel said nothing: she was determined not to give explanations, but to elicit them if possible—because it naturally struck her that if her ghost-like visitant were really a human being and an inmate of the house, the same means which afforded him admittance to her room might furnish her with an avenue of escape. She now, while retracing her way by Mrs. Martin's side along the gravel-path, carefully scrutinized the rear of the building. The garden had high walls on either side, and was bounded by the shrubbery at the bottom. The New River flowed past the outer edge of the shrubbery, and thus hemmed the enclosure in at that extremity. The walls stretched down to the river's brink; and the ends of the masonry were garnished with long rows of iron spikes, so as to prevent any one from passing round them. The back of the mansion showed merely a number of windows, all furnished with iron bars; and the result of Henrietta's survey was the sad conviction that even if she could escape from her room into the garden, she would be as much a prisoner as ever.

"You have not explained to me," resumed Mrs. Martin after a long pause, "the nature of the sounds which alarmed you during the night?"

"You admit then the existence of the probability of such alarm?" said Henrietta: "or in other words, you are aware that there may have been strange noises heard?"

"Since you say so, I am bound to believe you," rejoined the woman, who evidently was as much disinclined to be communicative on the point as Henrietta herself. She waited for a reply—but as the maiden gave none, she went on to say, "If you hear anything more to-night you can tell me to-morrow. But let us now change the conversation. Are you not becoming weary of this obstinacy on your part? Depend upon it you will soon grow tired of it—if you are not already——"

"Instead of changing the conversation," interrupted Henrietta, "let us drop it altogether. I have now walked enough, and will return into the house."

"Just as you please," responded Mrs. Martin coldly: and she led the way back into the dwelling through the green-house.

When once more alone in her own suite of apartments, Henrietta sat down and reflected on the few words which had been exchanged between herself and Mrs. Martin. That in connexion with Beech-Tree Lodge there was some mystery into which Henrietta had as yet received small if any insight, she felt convinced: for when she had spoken of being disturbed in the night, Mrs. Martin had suggested *noises* as the cause, and had evidently been uneasy that such noises should have been heard. What noises could they be? for Henrietta had really heard none: and whence Mrs. Martin's uneasiness? The young girl could not help associating what she had *seen* with what Mrs. Martin supposed her to have *heard;* and therein perhaps lay the mystery. But was the house really haunted after all? No: Henrietta felt convinced that there was some mystery connected with natural and not with preternatural things. In short, was the being whom she had seen a prisoner within those walls? and was it some noise made by himself that Mrs. Martin fancied she might have heard? But still recurred the one paramount and bewildering question—namely, how on earth he had obtained admittance to her chamber?

Throughout that day she saw nothing of Lord Everton. Susan brought her up her meals according to the regular routine: the evening came—the usual question was asked between nine and ten o'clock, whether she had any farther orders to give—and on the negative being returned, the servant-woman bade her good night. Then commenced the same process of securing and barricading the outer door as hitherto—the locking of the other doors—and the careful examination of her bed-chamber ere Henrietta thought of taking repose.

All this being done, she deliberated with herself what course to pursue. Should she sit up, keep awake, and watch to see if the mysterious shape (whether apparition or living being) would revisit her? Yes: this was her decision, notwithstanding she felt exhausted and in need of repose. She would not entrust herself to the luxurious softness of the easy chair, lest sleep should overtake her unawares: but she sat down in a common chair, on the alert to cast her eyes to any part of the room whence the slightest sound might emanate. Presently however she felt a drowsiness stealing over her; and then in order to shake it off she rose up from her seat and paced to and fro. She snuffed the candle, so that there should be no dimness wherein she might be taken by surprise; and as time wore on she grew more nervous, more anxious.

The village-church proclaimed twelve; and Henrietta stood still to count the strokes, so that she might be assured of the right hour. The metallic sound of the iron tongue of Time rolled oscillating through the still air of the night;—but mingling with the last vibrations of that sound, there seemed to be the mournful lament of a human voice. Henrietta listened with a sudden feeling of awe; and she could distinctly hear a prolonged lamentation—not loud, but still plain and unmistakable. All in an instant this was broken by a wild thrilling cry—— good heavens, what a cry! that seemed to rend the whole edifice in twain. It ceased—all was still—but the poor girl sank trembling with affright into the easy chair, which was the nearest to her at the moment.

Her heart beat with such loud palpitations that she could hear them as if a clenched hand were thumping against the cushioned side of the chair in which she was now reclining. Every fibre and nerve in her frame seemed galvanized with the sensation of terror. But gradually this feeling subsided; and she thought to herself that instead of experiencing alarm on her own account, she ought to feel sympathy on that of the unhappy wretch whose lament and shriek she had heard. All continued still and tranquil: the silence which had followed that appalling cry had something dread and stupendous in it. Henrietta sat in the easy chair, wondering what it could all mean, and associating in her mind those lamentations and that cry with the noises to which Mrs. Martin had alluded, and the whole with the visitations she had received in her chamber.

There is a terror the excess of which produces a re-action that merges into a lulling effect,—the natural stupor which inevitably follows the extreme tension of all the nerves. Thus was it with Henrietta Leyden, and insensibly did a sort of dreamy repose steal upon her as she reclined in that arm-chair to which she had in the first instance been so fearful of entrusting herself.

Her sleep was not however sound. It was that kind of dozing in which consciousness is not altogether lost, but confused and hazy,—a sort of semi-sleep from which the slightest sound will startle one. And thus was Henrietta all in a moment aroused into complete wakefulness; and springing up from the chair, she beheld some one in her room. But it was not the mysterious figure of the two former nights: it was Lord Everton.

"Wretch!" cried Henrietta in wildest alarm; and her eyes swept round the room to see if any open door showed the means by which he had obtained admittance: but the survey was vain—and it seemed to her as if he had sprung up from the very floor beneath her feet.

"Charming Henrietta," said the nobleman, "this passion will not serve you. Foolish girl that you are to refuse all the brilliant advantages which I offer you, but which nevertheless shall be yours in spite of yourself——"

"Coupled with infamy!" murmured Henrietta in a hoarse but resolute voice. "No, my lord—never, never!"

"Let us sit down and converse tranquilly," said the nobleman. "You perceive that you are in my power——"

"Lord Everton, I command you to quit this room!" interrupted Henrietta, flinging round her eyes in search of some weapon of defence. "You may use force, my lord—but the struggle will be a desperate one."

"In which you must succumb!" exclaimed the old nobleman: and maddened by his passion, he suddenly sprang forward and caught the young captive in his arms.

At that instant a third person appeared upon the scene—gliding in swift as a fleeting shadow—so suddenly, so quickly, that Henrietta, especially in the trouble and excitement of her mind, saw not whence he came and observed not how. But she *did* in an instant recognize this shape: it was the one she had twice seen before—the one enveloped in the flowing gown and with the pale sad face; but the features now wore a fierce and terrible expression.

"Monster!" was the single word which fell upon Henrietta's ear, and which was addressed to Lord Everton, who had instantaneously relinquished his hold on her: and the utterance of that word was accompanied by a terrific blow dealt by the new comer, and which laid the old nobleman prostrate and senseless on the floor.

"This way, this way!" said the stranger, quickly grasping Henrietta's wrist, and thus proving that he was indeed a being of flesh and blood.

Then quick as thought he led her round the foot of the bed to an opening in the wall, through which they both darted; and now Henrietta found herself in a corridor communicating with a staircase which she saw at a glance was not the principal one of the mansion, nor one which she had seen before. A lamp burnt in that corridor, and another on the staircase, down which Henrietta was hurried by her companion. With such mad precipitation did he proceed, that it was a wonder he was not hurled to the bottom, dragging her along with him; and full evident was it that he knew it to be a desperate attempt at escape which they were thus making.

A vain one too! For all in a moment the rushing noise of several footsteps was heard. "Seize them! seize them!" were the words which reached the ears of the fugitives; and in another moment they were encountered by Mark Bellamy, the footman, Mrs. Martin, Susan, and the gardener, who all emerged from another corridor joining that same staircase on the lower storey.

With a desperate blow from his clenched fist, Mark Bellamy struck down Henrietta's companion;

and he fell heavily without uttering a word, either stunned or killed. A piercing shriek burst from the damsel's lips; and overcome with terror and despair, she fainted in the arms of the females.

When she returned to consciousness, she found herself undressed and lying in the bed of that chamber which she knew too well, and whence for a moment there had seemed the hope if not the certainty of escape. In a word, she was still a captive at Beech-Tree Lodge.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MASQUERADE.

THE Duke and Duchess of Harcourt gave a grand masquerade-ball at their splendid mansion overlooking the Green Park. This palatial edifice had only been recently built: it occupied an enormous space of ground—immense sums had been laid out alike on its architectural arrangements and its internal embellishments—and in all respects it was said to rival the Sovereign's palace in the immediate vicinity.

The Duke and Duchess of Harcourt were giving a splendid series of entertainments to celebrate their installation in their new residence; and this masquerade-ball formed one of the festivals. His Grace was about sixty-four years of age, and boasted his descent from one of the oldest families in the kingdom. Retrospecting over a long line of ancestors—or contemplating their portraits in the picture-gallery of his new palace—he might safely reckon amongst them as large a number of miscreants, marauders, and ruffians, together with as pretty a sprinkling of demireps, as ever entered into the catalogue of any aristocratic genealogy. But with this point we have at present nothing to do: suffice it to say that his Grace the Duke of Harcourt was supremely proud of his bloodstained ancestors and courtezan ancestresses; and therefore we may safely leave him—certainly unenvied—to such pleasant satisfaction. He was an ultra-Tory—not from honest conviction, because he was too shallow-minded to be able to understand great political questions or national interests: but he was a Tory, for the simple reason that his father, his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and so on, were all Tories before him—and therefore he inherited their prejudices along with the hereditary title and estates. In person, he was a short, thin, lantern-visaged, mean-looking little man; and when standing next to his valet or his butler, if a stranger had been asked "Which is the Duke?" he would have been sure to point out either the valet or the butler in preference to the Duke himself.

The Duchess was twenty years younger than her husband—tall, stately, and in the glorious *embonpoint* of forty-four. She had a proud and haughty look; but was withal vain, conceited, frivolous, and narrow-minded. Half-a-dozen children whose ages varied from sixteen to twenty-four, were the issue of her union with the Duke of Harcourt: but we will not now intrude upon the reader the long-winded and high-sounding names of the three sons and three daughters forming the olive branches of this ducal family. Suffice it to say that my Lord Marquis the eldest son, who was heir to the title and estates, already an M.P., and with the peerage in prospective, was little better than a driveling idiot: while his two brothers, having finished their education at those pandemonia called Universities, were looking out for government places; and his three sisters were vain and frivolous girls, reflecting the character and example of their mother, and looking out for husbands as their brothers were for places.

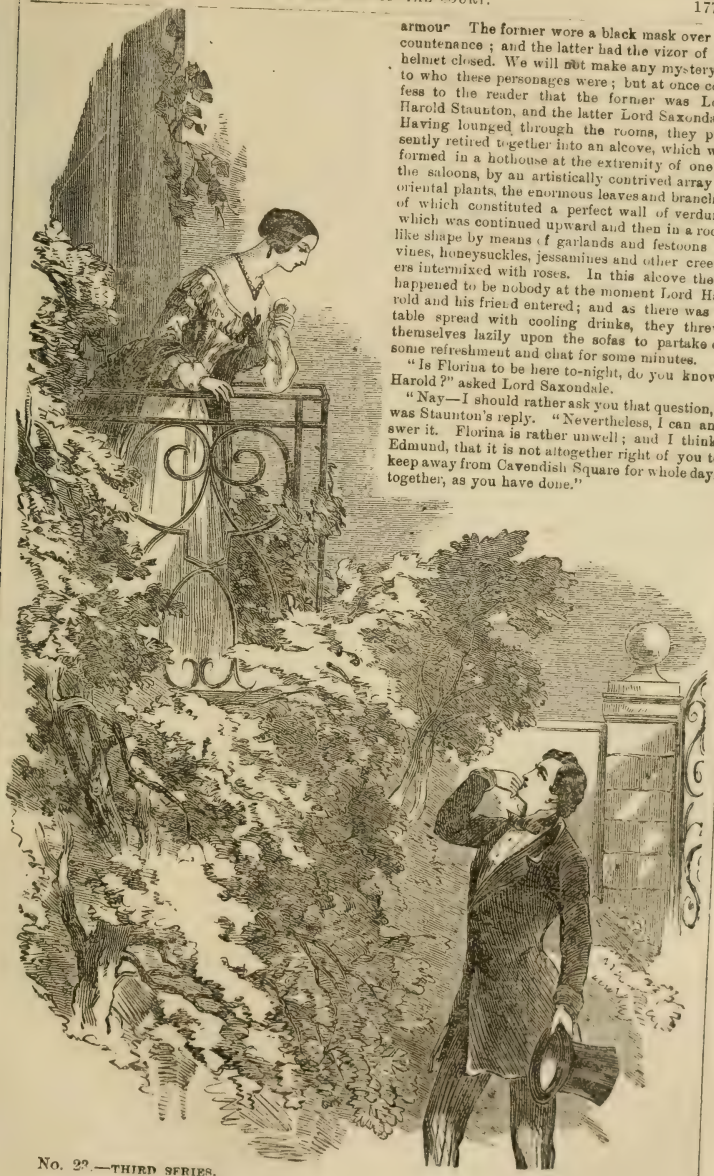
It was at Harcourt House, then, that this splendid masquerade-ball was given. The aristocracy and "*elite* of fashion" (as Court sycophants and servile scribes phrase it) had been talking and thinking of the forthcoming ball for a month past, and had been making ample preparations for their appearance at it. When the wished-for evening arrived, all the approaches to the mansion were thronged with carriages; and the police showed themselves mighty busy with their staves in clearing the way for those brilliant equipages amongst the "mob" and "rabble" (as the aristocracy term the working-classes). Two thousand invitations had been issued. Not that the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt had any friendly feeling towards a quarter so many persons: but they gathered together such a vast quantity of guests in order to show the world what an immense multitude their new palace could accommodate.

The entrance-hall was thronged with servants in gorgeous liveries—the immense staircases were hung with flowers that festooned above the statues and around the numerous lamps—the landings were embellished in a similar manner—and the spacious saloons were a perfect blaze of light, splendour, and magnificence. The guests, almost countless as they seemed, were multiplied over and over again in the immense mirrors which adorned the walls; and so numerous were the apartments thrown open for their reception, that they constituted a perfect maze for those who were not familiar with them. The largest of all was the concert-room, which was surrounded with boxes resembling those of a theatre, and in which the elderly or more quiet portion of the guests might seat themselves and enjoy the splendid *coup d'œil* presented by the busy, bustling, joyous crowd on the floor below.

Nearly all the company wore masques, or fancy dresses of some kind; and the grotesque, the ludicrous, and the fantastic blended strangely with the splendour, gorgeousness, and elegance of the whole. We will not pause to individualize the costumes: suffice it to say that unusual efforts had been made by many of the guests to introduce novelties of all descriptions—some pleasing, others startling—but all characterized by the display of wealth.

The carriages had begun to arrive shortly before ten o'clock; and by eleven all who intended to be present were there. So immense was the new palace, and so numerous were the saloons thrown open for their entertainment, that there was no inconvenient crowding—except perhaps here and there, where some masque by the novelty of his apparel or the fluent wit of his conversation succeeded in engrossing the attention of a large group around him.

Amongst the earliest of the arrivals were two gentlemen, the taller of whom was attired in the elegant costume of a Spanish Cavalier, and the other in a suit of admirably devised pasteboard



armour. The former wore a black mask over his countenance; and the latter had the vizor of his helmet closed. We will not make any mystery as to who these personages were; but at once confess to the reader that the former was Lord Harold Staunton, and the latter Lord Saxondale. Having lounged through the rooms, they presently retired together into an alcove, which was formed in a hothouse at the extremity of one of the saloons, by an artistically contrived array of oriental plants, the enormous leaves and branches of which constituted a perfect wall of verdure, which was continued upward and then in a roof-like shape by means of garlands and festoons of vines, honeysuckles, jessamines and other creepers intermixed with roses. In this alcove there happened to be nobody at the moment Lord Harold and his friend entered; and as there was a table spread with cooling drinks, they threw themselves lazily upon the sofas to partake of some refreshment and chat for some minutes.

"Is Florina to be here to-night, do you know, Harold?" asked Lord Saxondale.

"Nay—I should rather ask you that question," was Staunton's reply. "Nevertheless, I can answer it. Florina is rather unwell; and I think, Edmund, that it is not altogether right of you to keep away from Cavendish Square for whole days together, as you have done."

"My dear friend," rejoined the dissipated young nobleman, "I must confess that I have not behaved well—especially as you know I am very fond of Flo. But when one gets hold of a new mistress——"

"Understand me, Edmund," interrupted Lord Harold, "I do not at all object to your amour with Emily Archer: but I must remind you that being engaged to my sister, you at least ought to show her proper attention. However, if you pay your respects in Cavendish Square to-morrow, you can make some apology for your neglect. Take care how you keep the vizor of your helmet up too long while drinking your lemonade; for some one might enter this alcove abruptly, and recognize you—in which case you would lose all the amusement of the *incognito* for the rest of the evening."

"Trust me," exclaimed Edmund, "I do not mean to spoil my fun, I can assure you."

"Tell me, my dear fellow," said Staunton; "what on earth put it into your head to wear such a dress as that? It must keep you as stiff as if encased in buckram. And as for dancing, of course you will not think of such a thing with your pasteboard armour."

"I will tell you, Harold, why I had this suit made for me," responded Saxondale. "You know that I am descended from an ancestor who founded my family in the time of the Tudors; and so I thought I could not do better than represent my ancestor here to-night."

"Are your mother and sisters coming?" inquired Harold.

"To tell you the truth I know very little about it, but I believe that Juliana and Constance had fancy-dresses made. And as for my lady-mother, I have not heard her say anything on the subject. For myself, I had my pasteboard panoply sent, as you know, to your lodgings——"

"Yes—and a precious deal of trouble Alfred and I had to put your armour on for you," observed Lord Harold. "If the knights of the olden time had so much difficulty in getting on their mail, they must have spent half their lives in dressing and the other half in undressing again."

"And now I bethink me," exclaimed Saxondale, as a sudden recollection struck him, "we were so occupied in fitting on this precious armour of mine, when I was with you in Jermyn Street this evening, that you had not leisure to finish the anecdote you had commenced."

"It can be told in a few words," rejoined Lord Harold. "But here—read this note, if you can manage to do so through the bars of your helmet. You may perceive it was dated the day before yesterday."

Thus speaking, Staunton drew forth a *billet*, which he handed to Lord Saxondale, who received it with his pasteboard gauntlet; and having clumsily managed to open it, read the following lines:—

"TO THE LORD HAROLD STAUNTON,

"A lady who loves you, but of whose passion you are not aware, desires an opportunity of conversing with you for a few minutes and without restraint. This opportunity will be afforded by the masquerade-ball given by their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt next Wednesday evening, and to which you are no doubt invited. It will be desirable, for the purposes of mutual recognition, that the costumes we are respectively to wear, should be previously known to each other. Permit me therefore, by virtue of my sex, to dictate to you the apparel in which you must appear, and which will best become that handsome person which has made so deep an impression on my heart. Lord Harold, for that occasion you must play the part of a *Spanish Cavalier*: and inasmuch as it is possible that there may be other gentlemen who will choose the same elegant and picturesque style of costume, I beseech you to wear in front of your cap the diamond-clasp which I enclose. You may know me by the costume of *Queen Isabella of Spain*—not the child-Queen of the present day, but the wife of the great Ferdinand and the patroness of Christopher Columbus. As the Queen of Spain therefore, it will only be fitting and proper that I should receive your homage; and I shall accordingly expect to be accosted by my gallant Spanish cavalier on Wednesday night at Harcourt House. In order to give additional weight to this mandate, I sign myself for the present,

"ISABELLA OF SPAIN."

The writing was in a female hand, but evidently disguised; and as Lord Saxondale returned the note to Harold Staunton, he glanced through the bars of his helmet at the clasp alluded to therein. It was a beautiful and costly ornament, and was therefore an unmistakable token that the fair writer of the letter, whoever she might be, intended no jest, but was in downright earnest.

"You are a fortunate fellow, Harold," observed Edmund: "and this love-affair promises to be of a very interesting nature. Of course, you have not the slightest idea who the lady is?"

"Not the slightest," responded Staunton. "I know nothing more than you yourself have gathered from that letter. It was left at my lodgings the day before yesterday, by some messenger who immediately went away. Whether the lady is old or young, handsome or ugly, tall or short, I know no more than yourself: but I should hope and imagine that she possesses some share of beauty—otherwise she cannot expect that her gift of the diamond-clasp will be sufficient to chain me to her chariot wheels."

"Depend upon it she is handsome," observed Edmund: "for she must have great faith in her own charms and be accustomed to conquest, thus to single *you* out as the object of her passion."

"That is just what I think," rejoined Staunton; "and unless she is a very great fool, she must be tall and elegant, and possess a queenly figure to have chosen the costume in which she is to make her appearance. But the room seems to be filling now: let us lounge forth from this alcove again. We shall have to separate presently, Edmund, when my unknown *inamorata* makes her appearance, and perhaps she may engross me for all the rest of the evening. Therefore we may as well make an appointment for to-morrow—that is to say, unless you intend to cut me altogether and devote yourself entirely to Emily Archer."

"How can you say such a thing, Harold?" exclaimed Saxondale. "You know very well that I consider you my best friend. We will dine together to-morrow evening at Long's, and chat over all things interesting to ourselves. So *that* is an appointment, remember. By the bye, have you made any progress in your pursuit of the beautiful Angela Vivaldi?"

"Candidly speaking, my dear Edmund, I have not," answered Lord Harold Staunton. "I cannot even find out where she lives; and you know perfectly well that the idea of obtaining access to her at the Opera is preposterous. But I have not

abandoned the pursuit, and mean to devote myself pretty closely to it in a few days——"

"Unless," observed Edmund, "this new love-affair which presents itself in so mysterious a shape by means of that letter and the appointment for to-night, turns all your thoughts into quite another direction."

"Well, it may do so," remarked Lord Harold, carelessly. "But even if my unknown *inamorata* be beautiful beyond expectation, I do not think her charms can possibly come up to those of Angela Vivaldi."

The two young noblemen finished their lemonade, and re-adjusted the one his mask and the other his vizor over their countenances. They then lounged forth from the bowery alcove, and made their way amongst the multitude of guests that had been pouring into the saloons during the half-hour spent in the preceding colloquy. As we have already said, there were costumes of every variety and all descriptions. Amongst those worn by gentlemen, were several Spanish Cavalier dresses; but with none were the plumes of the cap fastened by means of so brilliant a diamond clasp as that which shone above Lord Harold Staunton's masked countenance. There were also amongst the female costumes several representing the apparel of Spanish queens and princesses of the olden time: but none which identified itself with that of the wife of the illustrious Ferdinand. Half-an-hour passed, and the two friends were still lounging about together, when all of a sudden Lord Harold nudged his companion's elbow, and said in a hasty whisper, "Now, Saxondale, we must separate."

Edmund cast a look in the direction towards which Lord Harold was himself at the time gazing; and he beheld a tall, stately, and majestic female figure, clad in a queenly apparel which set off her fine shape to the fullest and noblest advantage. She wore a black mask upon her countenance; and the silken fringe descended so low as entirely to cover her chin, the vizard thus concealing the entire face, save and except the bright eyes which sent their glances flashing through the holes.

"I wish you success," whispered Saxondale; and turning away from his friend, he walked off to another part of the room.

Lord Harold Staunton advanced towards the lady who had just entered, and whose appearance seemed to correspond with that of her whom he was expecting: but he dared not immediately accost her, although he felt convinced that the costume which she wore was intended to represent that of Isabella of Spain. Not long was he suffered to remain in suspense: for the lady herself, no doubt singling him out from all other Spanish Cavaliers then present by the diamond-clasp upon his cap, made a slight beckoning signal which his eye immediately caught. The next instant he was by her side; and she at once placed her arm in his.

He led her gently amidst the brilliant assemblage, in the direction of the alcove where he and Saxondale had so recently been; and not a word was spoken by either of them as they advanced towards that spot. Lord Harold felt himself a prey to mingled rapture and confusion. Though the lady's countenance was so effectually concealed that he could not obtain the slightest glimpse of it,—and thus if she had been his own sister he could not have recognised her,—yet he felt assured that behind that mask was a countenance well worthy to be gazed upon. His eyes swept over the superb outlines of her noble and majestic shape; and he thought to himself that a form blending so much voluptuous symmetry with dignified elegance and feminine grace, could not possibly be associated with an ordinary, much less an ugly countenance. And then, too, there was something in the whole bearing, the gait, the gestures, and the walk of his companion which seemed to indicate a lady of the highest rank: so that while he was excited with a pleasurable suspense as to what the style of her beauty might be, he felt embarrassed and confused as to the way in which he should address her. Indeed, for one with whom timidity was not very prevalent, this awkwardness on his part was singular, and could only have arisen from the presentiment that it was no ordinary or commonplace love-adventure in which he was engaged. But who the lady might be, he could not form the remotest conjecture. Not only did the mask so effectually conceal her countenance, but the drapery which she wore upon her head and which descended upon her shoulders, altogether veiled her hair, and even the shape of that head, the carriage of which upon the arching neck and fine shoulders was nevertheless statuesque and queenly. Above the drapery she wore a crown, the diamonds of which reflected with jets of light the lustre of the many lamps suspended to the ceilings and ranged round the walls; and her flowing garments were embellished with precious stones. There seemed to be a real royalty about her, as there was likewise a mystery which enhanced the romantic charm of the love-affair wherein Lord Harold Staunton thus found himself engaged.

It must not be supposed that this meeting between the young nobleman and the unknown lady had anything marked or extraordinary in it so as to attract the notice of the other guests; for there were plenty of encounters of the same kind, and according to preconcerted arrangements: besides, no one could tell whether a lady, when thus meeting a gentleman, was not being joined by a brother, an intimate friend, a near relative, or an acknowledged suitor. Certain it was, however, that on her first entrance the lady did attract much attention, but solely on account of the tasteful elegance of her dress and her own imposing and grandly symmetrical figure. We have already said that a pair of dark eyes sent their fires flashing through the holes in the mask; and as Lord Harold caught those glances, he beheld therein an additional reason for supposing that the countenance to which such eyes belonged must be eminently handsome.

They passed amidst the brilliant assemblage, not with the haste of persons wishing to break the spell of silence as speedily as possible, nor as if they were purposely seeking the alcove for the sake of retirement from the rest: but they proceeded in the slow and gracefully lounging manner which is adopted in the ball-room—and on reaching the alcove, they passed into it with the air of a couple seeking no studied seclusion, but merely availing themselves in a casual manner of an opportunity to retire for a while from the midst of the more heated atmosphere of the saloon.

"And now, fair lady—or rather, I should say

your Majesty," observed Lord Harold Staunton, in a tone of courteous gaiety, as he conducted his companion to a seat in the alcove and placed himself by her side,—"may I be permitted to behold that countenance which is to shed the light of such joy upon my heart, and the beauty of which is to render me for ever the most devoted of your admirers?"

"Lord Harold Staunton," replied the lady, in a voice which was not merely low and subdued, but also disguised,—a tone which, we may here remark, she preserved throughout the entire discourse that followed,—"you will perhaps find that this adventure in which you have embarked, is of a more mysterious and romantic character than you could possibly have conceived it to be. As yet you stand but on the threshold of it. If you hesitate to proceed farther, you are at full liberty to retreat at once—and there will be no harm done: but if you decide upon following up the enterprise, you must prepare to obey my dictates in all things, and to render me good service ere you can hope for your reward."

"The adventure has already become so interesting," at once replied Staunton, "that I am prepared to fall upon my knees at the feet of Queen Isabella of Spain, and vow the homage of my heart and the service of my arm."

"Speak not too quickly, Sir Cavalier," replied the unknown lady: "for I ought to address you according to your assumed character, and not as Lord Harold Staunton. But again I say, speak not too quickly—promise not too hastily—lest you should repent of your rashness and precipitation."

"It must be something of an extraordinary character which your Gracious Majesty has to command your humble servant to undertake that you should be in any doubt as to whether he will accept the service:"—and as Lord Harold thus spoke, he took the lady's hand in his own.

"The pressure of this hand," she at once said, suiting the action to the word, "is for the present the only earnest you can receive of that love which I bear you. For I warn you beforehand that I shall not even remove the mask from my countenance this evening—nor tell you who I am—nor allow you the slightest cue to the discovery of my name. That it is a proud and a noble one, I give you the solemn assurance——"

"And I am not to behold that countenance which I feel convinced is so handsome?" said Lord Harold, in accents of mingled cajolery and disappointment.

"No—not this evening. And yet I swear to you that it *is* handsome—handsomer perhaps than your imagination may depict—of a beauty indeed that may court comparison with the charms of any lady in this brilliant assemblage. And that I love you, my own cavalier,—if such I am indeed to call you, and if such you will prove,—I have already avowed and hesitate not to avow again. I am rich also," continued the lady; "and if it be any proof of my love to lavish my wealth upon you, that testimony shall likewise be given. Now, will you accept this love of mine? will you become the favourite cavalier on whose head Queen Isabella may shower her bounties? and will you in anticipation of the crowning recompense of all that woman can bestow, blindly and devotedly enlist yourself in my service?"

"*Devotedly*—yes," rejoined Lord Harold: "but *blindly*—I do not comprehend the sense in which you use the term, most Gracious Queen."

"I mean that you will undertake to fulfil the task I shall enjoin you, without questioning me as to my motives—without in any way seeking to discover them, until the time may come when I shall be permitted to reveal them. Now say, Sir Cavalier, have you sufficient faith in my love and my beauty, as well as in my gratitude, to devote yourself thus blindly to my service?"

"Yes—Oh, yes!" answered Lord Harold, lost in mingled wonder and infatuation; and even as he pressed the lady's gloved hand between both his own, he felt a thrill of ecstatic pleasure quivering through his entire frame.

"I shall not express my gratitude now for this assurance which you give me," she went on to observe, "because it is but the meet and adequate return you are making for the love which I have already given you. I have long loved you, my own handsome cavalier—I have often thought of revealing the secret of this love; but I have not dared to do so! And when I give you this assurance you will perhaps take it as a proof that it is no dissipated creature, no debauched demirep, no trafficker in numerous amours, who is now addressing you,—but one who has never yet proved faithless to the duties of her sex—never yet stained the purity of her reputation!"

"But the service you demand of me—tell me quick, my adored Queen Isabella," urged Lord Harold, "that I may undertake it with the least possible delay, and thus bring myself nearer to the crowning happiness which is to be my reward."

"I have already told you, Sir Cavalier," replied the unknown lady, "that it is a service of the valorous arm which I demand of you."

"Oh! but all this must be a mere jest, beautiful Queen Isabella," exclaimed Lord Harold. "Yet if it suits your whim or caprice to carry on the conversation in the same style——"

"You see," interrupted the lady, "that in order to be consistent with circumstances, we must be in all respects what we suppose ourselves—I Queen Isabella of Spain, and you my own cavalier. Now then, such being our present belief, we are living in the age of chivalry when gallant warriors court deeds of danger in order to distinguish themselves that they may win the admiration of their ladyloves. Know, then, Sir Cavalier, that I have an enemy—a mortal enemy, of whom I wish to be rid. No matter how he became my enemy, nor what he has done, nor wherefore I wish to extirpate him from my path. It is sufficient for you to know that I have this enemy, and that the devoted champion who shall give him his doom, becomes the master of my heart."

The lady paused—but Lord Harold Staunton knew not what observation to make. He could not regard her words as serious; and yet they were uttered full seriously. He therefore held his peace; and through the eyelet-holes of his mask did he gaze upon the disguised unknown with a poignant desire to penetrate the mystery which enveloped her.

"Perhaps you imagine," she resumed, all the while speaking in a low and dissembling voice, "that this is a mere masquerading whimsicality?

But it is not so. We will if you please drop our fancied characters, and resume our real ones:—that is to say, you shall be once more Lord Harold Staunton, and I will be an unknown lady of high rank and title who loves you, who demands a service at your hand, and who offers you everything that woman can give as the recompense of that service when it shall be accomplished. It is true, as I have been telling you, that I have an enemy—true that he must be removed from my path: but start not, Lord Harold Staunton—I ask you not to commit the foul crime of murder! No—there are other means of accomplishing the aim. First of all, however, I ask that you will believe me when I assure you I have been insulted by a certain individual; and secondly, that I am serious in demanding his punishment at your hands."

"If you indeed be serious, most incomprehensible unknown," replied Staunton, "I will undertake to punish any man who has insulted you."

"This is what I require," continued the lady. "You must seek out this individual to whom I allude; and without appearing to have any special purpose in view, or to be prompted by a premeditated design, you must provoke him to a quarrel—level some insult at him—and then——For I understand that with the pistol no man in England can outvie Lord Harold Staunton——"

"But you are *not* serious—you cannot be serious!" ejaculated the young nobleman, who was not so thoroughly depraved as to listen without emotion to this murderous project. "If it were to inflict personal chastisement upon the individual to whom you are alluding, I should not hesitate——"

"And would not that inevitably lead to a duel?" asked the lady.

"True!" ejaculated Staunton: then in a slow and deliberate manner he said, "But to seek in cold blood a dispute with some one who has never injured me——"

"Our interview may end here," said the lady curtly as she rose from her seat. "I have been mistaken in Lord Harold Staunton; and I am sorry that I should have given him the trouble to listen to me thus far——still more sorry," she added in a murmuring voice, as if she were deeply moved, "that I should have bestowed upon him my love!"

"Stop one moment—do not let us part thus!" exclaimed Harold, whose head was turning with the bewilderment of his ideas and the infatuation of his senses. "Forgive me if I hesitated: but all this is so singular—so romantic—indeed, it appears to belong to another age and another country——"

"And yet it belongs to this age, to this country, and to the present moment," rejoined the lady, suffering herself to sink down again upon the sofa, in compliance with the movement which Harold imparted to the pressure of his hand as he grasped her own. "But in this age as well as in any other, and in this country too, the aspiring lover must often do something to win his beauteous mistress; and I have assured you, though I myself say the words, that the lady in the present case *is* worth the winning. Now listen to me for a minute longer. You are gay, Lord Harold—and the love of a beautiful woman cannot be indifferent to you: you are comparatively poor—and the wealth which she can lavish must be an object to you. You are asked to risk your life for her, that you may clear her path of an enemy; and if you accomplish this, you need not accept her love as a favour or her wealth as a boon, but demand them both as a right."

"I yield—I consent—I am your devoted Cavalier—and you are once again my Queen Isabella, to whom all homage is due!" and as he thus spoke, Lord Harold Staunton pressed her gloved hand to his lips. "Now, name to me this individual——"

"No—not to-night," at once replied the lady. "I must leave you a few hours to think well over the matter. To-morrow, soon after nine o'clock, you shall receive the name of the individual in a letter. But I must exact from you, my own cavalier, the most solemn and sacred promise that you will not breathe aught of all this to a single living soul. If by any accident you should suspect or discover who I am before the time comes when I may choose to reveal myself, you must still more religiously than ever keep the secret in your own breast. If you prove indiscreet I am certain to hear of it: if you breathe a single syllable in the ear of another, although you may exact an oath of inviolability from that other, yet shall I be certain to find out your imprudence—I will even call it your treachery. And in that case my love would turn to hatred; and instead of looking for a recompense, you would have to beware of my vengeance! But on the other hand, if you prove faithful to your promise—if you keep the secret as religiously as if it were one revealed from the dead—and if you serve me to the fullest extent, not deviating one single inch from the course I have laid down, there is nothing you can ask of me that I shall not be prepared to grant."

Having thus spoken, the lady rose; and Lord Harold likewise quitted his seat. He would have detained her still longer — he would have besought and conjured her to throw off at once the mystery wherewith she had surrounded herself—but she took his arm, and in a firm though still in a low and disguised voice, said, "Enough for the present! Let us now lounge forth again amongst the company."

They accordingly issued from the bowery alcove, and threading the whole range of state apartments, conversed upon indifferent topics. But there was to a certain degree a restraint and embarrassment on the part of both; and the lady, appearing to feel this, suddenly observed, "Lord Harold, let us separate for the present. Remember your promise: remember also that I love you!"

She then quitted him abruptly, and mingling amongst the thickest of the multitude, was speedily lost to his view. He remained standing where she had left him for two or three minutes, wrapt up in profound thought, from which he was aroused by being suddenly caught by the arm. It was Lord Saxondale in his pasteboard armour who had thus rejoined him.

"Well, my dear Harold, how got you on with your mysterious unknown?" he asked. "Is she mysterious still? is she still unknown? and was it all a mere masquerading trick? Or are you really and truly blessed with the love of some lady whose beauty outshines her virtue? By heaven, though I cannot see your face, yet I can tell that you are not altogether as you ought to be!"

"My dear Edmund, if I made a gesture of impa-

tience you must not take it as unkind," responded Lord Harold Staunton: "for I was thinking at the moment of all that had passed between that lady and myself."

"Then it is really a settled love affair," observed Edmund. "But I suppose you mean to tell me all about it after showing me the letter: besides which, you and I never have any secrets from each other——"

"Oh no, never!" ejaculated Staunton. "Only on the present occasion I have nothing to tell. Have you amused yourself?" he inquired, endeavouring to turn the conversation into another channel.

"Yes, uncommonly well. I have had such fun with some of the masques: they have endeavoured to find out who I am, but cannot for the life of them. My sisters are here—they are dressed as Maids of Honour in the time of Louis XIV: but my mother is not. I did not much think she would come—and the girls have just told me that she has shut herself up in her apartment at home in a fit of the sullens, or something of the sort. But come, let us go into the refreshment room and seize an opportunity of getting some wine without standing the chance of revealing who we are."

"Willingly," answered Lord Harold, glad that he had thus escaped at least for the present from farther questioning on the part of Lord Saxondale.

We need not dwell any longer upon the incidents, pleasures, or details of the masqued ball at Harcourt House. Suffice it to say that at two o'clock in the morning the supper-rooms were thrown open; and then it was expected—as indeed it was necessary for the purpose of partaking of the banquet—that all the guests should remove their masks. This was done; and infinite was the amusement produced by the revelation of countenances that now took place. But Lord Harold Staunton did not wait for the announcement of supper; and retired at an hour so early as to astonish and almost disgust Lord Saxondale, who declared his intention to remain until the end: but his friend pleaded sudden and severe indisposition as an excuse for his premature departure. The truth was that Harold was most anxious to reach his own lodgings, and ponder well upon all that had occurred between himself and the unknown lady. He was more infatuated with that mysterious being than it seemed possible for one of his reckless and dissipated character to become, and more than he himself could account for. When he retired to rest, sleep did not soon visit his eyes; and when it did come, he was pursued with the most fantastic dreams, Queen Isabella of Spain appearing conspicuous as the heroine.

He rose before nine in the morning, and anxiously awaited the arrival of the promised communication. Nor was he kept in suspense much beyond the promised hour. A letter was brought up by his valet Alfred at about half-past nine o'clock, and the address of which was written in the same disguised female hand as the billet he had shown to Lord Saxondale. On opening the letter he perceived at the first glance a bank-note for one thousand pounds; and inside the envelope was written a name——nothing but a name!

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Harold Staunton as that name met his eye—the name of the lady's enemy with whom he was to seek a dispute: and then, having given vent to that ejaculation, he fell into a profound reverie.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE GARDEN.

A WEEK had now elapsed since Florina's dream of bliss had been so cruelly destroyed by the tale she had heard and the discovery she herself had made relative to William Deveril. That tale from the lips of Lady Saxondale naturally seemed to the young maiden to be fully corroborated by what she had seen at the villa near the Regent's Park; and she could come to no other conclusion than that Deveril was a depraved, profligate, and unprincipled young man. No doubt lingered in her mind upon this point: she would have hoped if there had been room for hope—but there was none: she would still have furnished him with an opportunity of explaining his conduct—but she felt that there could be nothing to explain. That he was living with the eminent ballet-dancer was clear beyond the possibility of doubt; and with this proof of his depravity it was impossible any longer to suspect the truth of Lady Saxondale's narrative.

Florina wrestled with all her strength against the grief which she experienced; but the shock had been so rude, the disappointment was so severe, that she could not help feeling it most deeply—most keenly. Her aunt Lady Macdonald, not for an instant suspecting the real truth, fancied that Florina was indisposed; and the young lady did not contradict the supposition. At the same time she declared that she was not sufficiently an invalid to require the attendance of the family physician, but that in a few days she should be herself again. The greater portion of the week was passed by Florina in the solitude of her own apartments,—but not with her ivory-painting nor her music. All the implements connected with the former did she place out of sight, inasmuch as they reminded her of him from whom she had learnt the art; and as for her music, she was not in spirits to enable her to play enlivening airs, and was already too sad to practise melancholy ones. It was a long and anxious week for poor Florina: often and often did the tears flow down her cheeks—often and often too was her bosom convulsed with sobs!

But during that week, had Deveril made no attempt to communicate with her? The reader will recollect that when he called at the house on the same day as Lady Saxondale, the door had been shut in his face, and he was dismissed with the intimation that his services were no longer required, but that he was to send in his account. At first he thought that Lady Macdonald had discovered what had taken place between himself and Florina; and he was thus plunged into the deepest despondency. But on the following day he learnt from other sources how Lady Saxondale had been propagating the most odious calumnies concerning him; and he now at once understood the motive of the treatment which he had received at Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square. He thereupon addressed a letter to Lady Macdonald, stating that the tongue of slander had been busy at work to injure him, and beseeching an opportunity to ex-

plain and vindicate his conduct in respect to Lady Saxondale. But Lady Macdonald returned him his letter in a blank envelope. He wrote to her again; and the second letter was returned unanswered. He called at the house once more, but was sternly denied an interview with her ladyship. Subsequently he waited about in the neighbourhood, on various occasions, in the hope of seeing Florina: but in this expectation he was disappointed. Not for an instant suspecting that it was she whose voice he had heard under such mysterious circumstances, that evening when she visited his villa-residence and when she had fled so precipitately, he of course knew not that she herself had any reason more than her aunt for thinking ill of him; and in his own heart he hoped and believed that Florina had *not* put faith in Lady Saxondale's story. Thus Deveril buoyed himself up with the idea that Florina herself had not turned against him, but at all events that if her suspicion or her jealousy had been excited, a word of explanation from his lips would clear up everything. He was therefore most anxious to find an opportunity of seeing her: but the whole week passed away without furnishing him such an occasion.

On her part Florina learnt from her aunt that he had called a second time and had also sent letters, but that his visit had been refused and his communications returned to him. It was only in a casual manner and in the course of conversation that Lady Macdonald mentioned these circumstances to her niece; for, as before stated, she entertained not the slightest suspicion that the young lady experienced any degree of interest in William Deveril. But what did Florina think of the young man's pertinacity in seeking to communicate with her aunt? She could only set it down to a brazen effrontery; and her unfavourable opinion of him was thus materially enhanced.

"He knows not," she said to herself, "that it was I who was indiscreet and imprudent enough to repair to his country-residence, and even penetrate up to the very threshold of his door, on that night when the fatal truth of his profligacy was made known to me. No—he could not suppose for an instant that I should have taken such a step—that I should have compromised myself in such a manner! He therefore fancies that the mode in which he is living is utterly unknown to me, and that therefore it is but Lady Saxondale's story which he has to explain away. This he seeks to do through the medium of my aunt, in the hope that if he succeeded therein he would stand on the same footing as heretofore in respect to myself. Alas, alas! the deeper the insight I obtain into William Deveril's character, the greater does his duplicity appear. Ah! and I who would have trusted my happiness to such a man—Oh! what a wreck should I have made of it. Better, better far to become the wife of Edmund Saxondale, who simulates no virtues, and therefore in his vices is at least free from hypocrisy, than bestow my hand on William Deveril, who is all deceit, all falsehood. I must banish his image from my memory——would that I had not loved him as I have! But after all, the lesson is perhaps intended by heaven to render me obedient to the wishes of my relatives, and entrust my happiness to their guidance. Surely, surely, my aunt, who has been so kind and good to me, can have but one motive in wishing me to espouse Edmund Saxondale?—and that motive is for the best. I will accept my destiny—and henceforth will be ruled by her who has supplied to me a mother's place."

Such was the train of reflections into which Lady Florina Staunton fell one evening, at the expiration of the week which had elapsed since the discoveries made concerning Deveril. She was seated in an apartment which looked upon the garden at the back of the house. The window was open—the bright green foliage of the trees outside waved around the iron railings of the balcony—and the perfume of the flowers was wafted into the room. There was a gentle breeze fraught with a refreshing influence after the sickly warmth of a sultry day; and Florina stepped forth upon the balcony to woo the cooling zephyr to her throbbing brows and flushed countenance. For her cheeks had a hectic red, and seemed to burn with the fever-heat which was upon her and which had arisen from the troubled state of her mind.

It has already been stated in a previous chapter that there was a means of egress from the premises at the back part of the house. This consisted of a side-gate opening from the garden into a carriage-way that ran between Lady Macdonald's mansion and the adjoining one, the stables belonging to both being at the bottom. As Florina stepped forth on the balcony, from the height where she stood she could see over the enclosure-wall into the alley just spoken of, and it was with feelings which suddenly became strangely agitated and conflicting that she beheld the object of her thoughts—William Deveril!

Yes—there he was, standing in the lane, evidently watching for her appearance; and the ejaculation of joy which burst from his lips the moment she stepped forth upon the balcony, reached her ears in the stillness of evening. Her first impulse was to retreat: but a still more powerful feeling held her rivetted where she stood. What followed was the work of an instant. Deveril flew to the gate—tore it open—and rushed into the garden. There was something which struck Florina as so audacious, so full of a matchless effrontery in this proceeding, that all her patrician dignity came to her aid in a moment. Drawing herself up to her full height, she waved her hand, saying, "Depart, sir—dare not to intrude yourself within the privacy of this garden!"

Deveril stopped suddenly short beneath the balcony, and gazed up with a look so full of astonishment and mournful reproach—so full of mingled tenderness and deprecating sorrow—that Florina felt a gush of ineffable emotions welling up from her heart, making her bosom throb, and producing a suffocating sensation in the throat,—so that her whole appearance grew suddenly changed and she seemed melting, yielding, forgiving!

"Lady Florina," said William Deveril, "I beseech you to grant me a few minutes' interview. It shall be to say that everything is at an end between us, if you will—but let me not be discarded for ever from your heart in consequence of a vile calumny. After everything which has taken place between us, I have a right to expect the opportunity of giving an explanation—and you can scarcely be so cruel or unjust as to refuse me one."

The young man spoke in a subdued but earnest voice. He spoke thus in a low tone for fear of

being overheard at other windows or by the neighbours; but so clear was his voice in its masculine melody, and so earnest were his accents in their manly pleading, that not a syllable was lost to Lady Florina's ears, although the balcony in which she stood was a considerable height from the ground. Then too, as she gazed down upon that young man whose personal beauty was of so fascinating a character, and whose form was so perfect in its statue-like symmetry—the music of his voice, too, flowing with such tender earnestness upon the evening zephyr, as if the melody of the human soul mingled with the perfumes which the flowers sent forth,—Lady Florina felt all her stern resolves thawing away, and the hostile feelings which had frozen in ice round her heart melting beneath the influence of reviving tenderness. Still she answered not immediately, but with a softening and mournful look gazed down upon him whom she had loved so tenderly and so well, and whom she would give the world to be able to love again!

"Ah! I see that you have believed the tale which has reached your ears," resumed Deveril as he anxiously watched her looks and thought that he understood all that was passing in her mind: "but now that you see me you can believe it no longer! Lady Florina, will you descend for a few minutes into the garden? or will you tell me how I may forward a letter to you? I have longed—Oh! I have longed to write, but was fearful of committing an indiscretion—afraid of compromising you——"

"Compromising me!" echoed Florina, with an access of scornful feeling, a sudden and total change taking place within her all in a moment, effected by that talismanic word which he had so unfortunately uttered: for she felt that she had indeed been compromised by having been beguiled into an avowal of love to that young man who dwelt privately with an opera-dancer. "Compromised!" she repeated bitterly; "Oh, you have already compromised me too much with myself!—and I know not how it is that I have so far forgotten all the proper pride of my position and my sex, to linger here even for the few moments that I have suffered you to address me."

Another instant, and Florina had disappeared from the balcony! She flitted away like an apparition—thus abruptly retreating into her apartment; and it seemed as if by magic that she had gone so suddenly. The casement was immediately closed; and Deveril, almost staggered by the blow, felt as if hope had suddenly perished within him.

"Good heavens!" he murmured bitterly, "has Lady Saxondale so successfully spread the venom of her calumny?"

He lingered for a few moments, gazing up at that balcony where the bright and beautiful object of his adoration had just before stood, and whence she had vanished as swiftly as hope also had vanished from his own heart. All in an instant he felt that he should be wrong to remain any longer there; and with a deep sigh he turned away. But as he issued forth from the garden-gate, he came in somewhat violent contact with an individual who was about to enter. They both retreated a step or two, and their lips gave ejaculatory utterance to each other's names.

"Ah! William Deveril!"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

And then there was a pause, during which the young nobleman looked strangely upon the youthful artist—while the latter had some difficulty in recovering from the confusion into which this most disagreeable and unexpected encounter had thrown him.

"May I inquire, sir," at length said Lord Harold sternly, "what you are doing here?"

"I came," at once responded William Deveril, "to give certain explanations which I have sought to give by all legitimate means——"

"I understand from my aunt, Lady Macdonald," interrupted Lord Harold Staunton, "that she has forbidden you the house, and that you have been persecuting her with calls and letters. I presume therefore that you have now been endeavouring to force your way into my aunt's presence—or that you penetrated hither for that purpose, but thinking better of it, were beating a precipitate retreat——"

"Your lordship must put what construction you will upon my conduct," returned Deveril, mildly but firmly: and he was determined to say nothing that should compromise Florina.

"What! you dare treat the matter thus coolly?" exclaimed Lord Harold. "Know you not, sir, that a nephew is bound to protect his aunt against such intrusion, or attempted intrusion as this?"

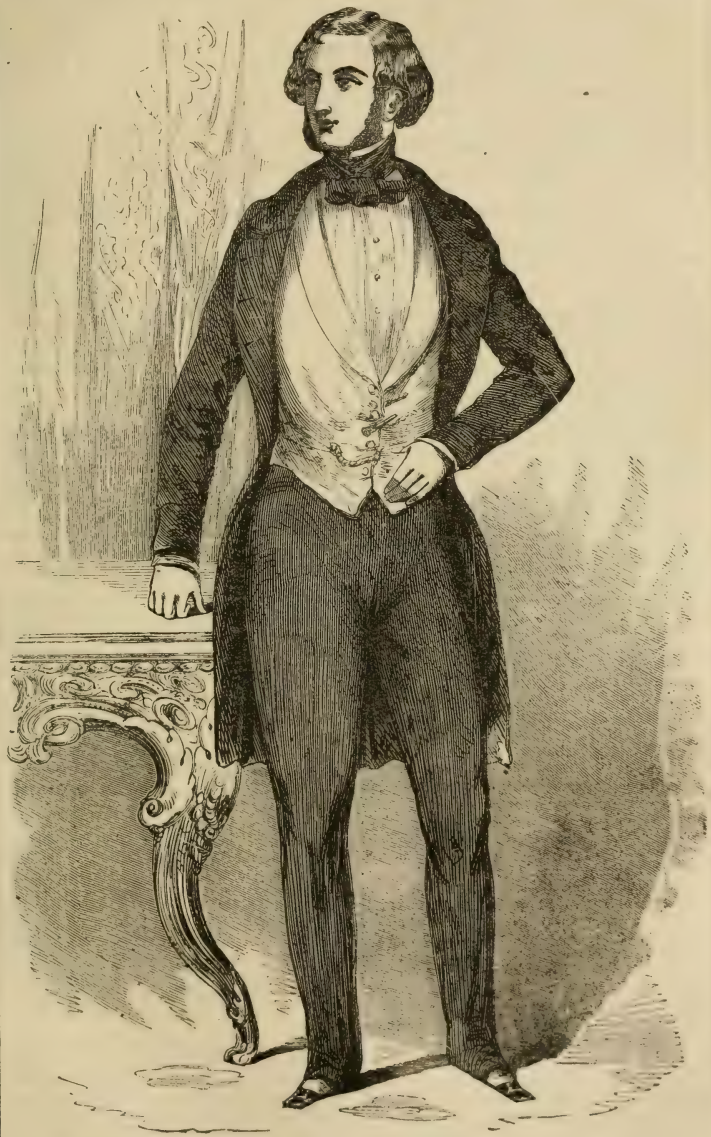
"I am well aware that my conduct must seem suspicious," replied Deveril, still calm and unexcited—and he was inwardly rejoiced to perceive that Lord Harold Staunton entertained not the slightest suspicion that it was to seek an interview with his sister and not with his aunt, that he (Deveril) had come thither.

"Suspicious indeed!" exclaimed the young nobleman, working himself up into a rage. "It is more than suspicious, sir—it is downright impudent—in short, it is conduct which deserves personal chastisement. Pity it is that no lacquey was at hand to kick you out of the premises into which you have dared intrude."

"My lord," said Deveril, his cheeks now reddening, "it would grieve me sorely to aggravate the impropriety of my conduct by saying anything harsh to you: but I must beg to remind your lordship that you are using language which I cannot listen to without indignation. I am well aware that I have been indiscreet in entering Lady Macdonald's premises in a surreptitious manner: but I have not done so without some excuse. Vilely calumniated, I was refused admittance at her ladyship's front-door—my letters were returned unopened—and not choosing to incur her ladyship's evil opinion without giving explanations on my own part to vindicate my character, I certainly sought admittance into her dwelling."

"You have been expelled her front door, and your letters have been returned unopened?" exclaimed Harold Staunton, repeating Deveril's words in a taunting manner. "Surely those indications were sufficient to convince you that your presence could be dispensed with; and any attempt to intrude again becomes an act of the grossest rudeness and most flagrant indecency. We will not however discuss the question farther. You must give me satisfaction, sir, for your impertinence."

"My lord," replied Deveril, now assuming a haughty dignity, which, as he was no aristocrat, was



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entirely his own—the natural pride of a man of high feeling,—"had you spoken in other terms I should certainly have held myself bound to make an apology for my intrusion within the precincts of Lady Macdonald's dwelling. Indeed, I have already said as much as to express my sense of its impropriety, and therefore my sorrow that I should have been guilty of such conduct. But, considering the tone which your lordship now thinks fit to adopt towards me, I decline to offer a single word in the shape of excuse or apology."

"Ah! is this your decision?" exclaimed Lord Harold fiercely.

"It is—most positively," returned Deveril, with increasing hauteur.

"Then," immediately rejoined the nobleman, "you will name the friend to whom I may send mine."

"What! would you provoke me to a duel?" cried Deveril, who had scarcely apprehended that it was Harold's intention to push matters to this extreme—and his heart smote him at the idea of standing up in a hostile manner against the brother of her whom he loved so devotedly.

"I have already told you, Mr. Deveril," was Staunton's answer, "that you must afford me satisfaction. I do not wish to give any unseemly provocation on my part: but as it appears," he added scornfully, "that you yourself require some such inducement to make you show your courage, I am forced to act thus. Consider, sir, that I have given you a blow:"—and with the tips of his fingers he touched Deveril on the cheek.

"Enough, Lord Harold!" exclaimed the young artist, his own spirit now thoroughly aroused. "You have asked me to name my friend—I refer you to Mr. Forester, whose apartments are in the Albany."

"I have some slight knowledge of Mr. Forester," responded Lord Harold, "and will lose no time in sending a friend to communicate with him."

He then bowed coldly and distantly, and turning on his heel, walked away without entering the precincts of his aunt's dwelling.

William Deveril lingered for a few moments to let him get to a distance, and then likewise proceeded up the lane into Cavendish Square.

We may here observe that on quitting the balcony, Lady Florina retreated into another apartment, which did not command a view of the garden nor of the premises at the back of the house. She therefore did not observe that William Deveril, on issuing forth from the enclosure, had encountered her brother in the alley.

Deveril bent his way direct to the Albany, where he inquired for Mr. Forester; but learning that this gentleman was not in at the moment, he penned a hurried note to prepare him for the visit which he might expect from Lord Harold's friend in the course of the evening. Having left this note with the porter of the Albany, Deveril proceeded to his lodgings in Pall Mall; on reaching which he immediately sat down at his writing-table and wrote the following lines:—

"Pall Mall, ½ past 8 o'clock.

"Dearest Angela,

"I promised you to be home by supper-time this evening: but urgent business retains me in town. I intend to sleep at my lodgings, but hope to be with you early in the forenoon to-morrow. Your affectionate

"WILLIAM."

This note Deveril at once despatched by a porter in a cab to his villa-residence in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. He then resumed his writing, and penned several letters. The first was also to Angela—another was to Mr. Gunthorpe—a third to Florina, and the others to friends or acquaintances. The task had occupied him nearly two hours; and when he had finished this correspondence, he sealed the several letters and packed them all up together in a sheet of paper. He then wrote upon the outside of the envelope, "*It is earnestly requested that the letters contained herein, may be delivered immediately to their respective addresses.*" He then locked up the packet in his writing-desk, and put the key in his pocket.

It was now half-past ten o'clock; and a double knock at the front-door resounded through the house. In a few moments Mr. Forester was announced. He was a young man of four-and-twenty, with a pleasing countenance, a genteel figure, and an air of mingled good-nature and frankness.

"My dear Deveril," he said, taking our hero's hand, "how the deuce have you managed to get yourself into this scrape with Lord Harold Staunton—you who are of such a peaceable disposition and excellent temper?"

Deveril gave Mr. Forester a hurried outline of what had taken place—or rather of such particulars as he thought fit to describe,—leaving Florina's name altogether out of the question, and suffering his friend to retain a similar impression to that which Lord Harold himself had received in respect to his intrusion into the garden; namely, that it was to seek an interview with Lady Macdonald, for the purpose of explaining away Lady Saxondale's calumnies.

"Well, it is an unpleasant business," said Forester: "but it seems there is no alternative save to exchange shots. Of course you know, Deveril—— and mind, I do not say it because I think it will make any undue impression on your mind——but it is my duty to mention the fact, that Lord Harold Staunton is what is termed——"

"I know what you mean," observed Deveril quietly, "a crack shot. I have heard it mentioned that he has performed the most astonishing feats with the pistol."

"I have seen him," rejoined Forester. "But you, my dear fellow—what sort of a marksman do you consider yourself?"

"I have never practised, and scarcely ever fired a pistol in my life," responded Deveril. "Besides, you do not think for a moment, Forester, that I mean seriously to attempt the taking of my adversary's life?"

"You will be insane if you do not," was his friend's answer: "for if you risk your own life, you certainly ought to do your best——"

"Enough upon that point," interrupted Deveril "At all events I shall do my duty. And now tell me, have you received a visit from his lordship's friend?"

"Captain Lennox of the Guards called upon me at half-past nine o'clock," replied Forester. "I had just returned to my rooms in the Albany, and had received your note, which not a little astonished me. However, everything is settled. You had better come and pass the night with me—we will have supper and champagne, and so forth——"

"Thank you—but I must decline your hospitality. I will breakfast with you at any hour you name in the morning."

"That must be at five punctually," rejoined Forester: "for we have to be upon the ground at half-past six o'clock."

"And which is the appointed place?" asked Deveril.

"The fields in the immediate vicinage of Hampstead Heath. By the bye, Captain Lennox undertook to bring the regimental surgeon with him; and therefore we need not trouble ourselves on that point. Have you got pistols? No. Well, I will take mine—and at all events you will have the benefit of good ones. And now, what are you going to do with yourself? You will not come with me to my rooms—shall I stay with you? or shall we go out together for an hour or two?"

"I wish to remain alone," answered Deveril. "Do not think me rude or churlish, nor insensible to your kind intention——"

"Not at all, my dear fellow," exclaimed Forester. "In these circumstances one does exactly as one chooses. Good night, then. You will be with me at five?"

"Not a minute later," answered Deveril: and Mr. Forester thereupon took his leave of the young artist.

CHAPTER XL

THE DUEL.

If we look into Lord Harold Staunton's lodgings in Jermyn Street, at precisely the same time when the preceding interview took place between Forester and Deveril in Pall Mall, we shall find that nobleman seated alone in his drawing-room. Captain Lennox had just left him, having communicated the arrangements made with Mr. Forestor, and having settled the hour of appointment when they were to meet again in the morning.

Lord Harold's countenance was grave and serious. It was not that he feared the duel, nor dreaded its consequences in respect to himself: but he scarcely admired the part he had played in provoking it.

"When once I stand in the presence of William Deveril," he said to himself, "I cannot help taking a deadly aim at him. It is for this purpose I have provoked the duel—and I almost wish that what has been done could be safely and honourably undone. But no: that is impossible! I am a fool," he suddenly exclaimed, speaking aloud and rising from his seat, "to let these feelings grow upon me. What is a duel after all? It is an incident in the life of every man of the world, and is fraught with an *eclat* of a flattering nature. Well, but somehow or another I cannot see the thing in this light on the present occasion. Pshaw! this is drivelling folly—I will and must be gay!"

Scarcely had he spoken these words, when a loud double knock reverberated through the house; and Lord Saxondale was speedily introduced.

"A pretty fellow you are, Harold, to make an appointment with me to dine at Long's and then break it. So I had to dine by myself. Good turtle and venison, however—and iced-punch excellent. Those were consolations."

"You must forgive me, my dear fellow," answered Staunton; "but some particular business kept me away from you. However, we can now go out and pass an hour or two together."

"What the deuce is the matter with you?" asked Edmund, surveying his friend with attention: "you have a strange look, and a sort of forced gaiety. Has anything happened? I hope nothing bad. Perhaps your creditors have been dunning you——"

"Well, it is something of that sort," observed Staunton, compelling himself to laugh, although he was not altogether in the humour. "But come—let us go and amuse ourselves somewhere."

"That is exactly what I wish," returned Saxondale. "Emily Archer is dancing away to-night at the Opera—and she will not have me to escort her home."

"What do you mean? You have broken with her already."

"Not I indeed! I mean that since I am going to amuse myself with you, she must amuse herself alone for once. Come."

The two young noblemen now strolled forth together. First of all they visited the gaming-table; and Saxondale, though by no means a shrewd observer, could not avoid noticing a continuation of that peculiarity which he had already seen in his friend's manner: but Harold had his own reasons for saying nothing to Edmund relative to the pending duel. He gambled recklessly, and drank large draughts of wine. His purse was well filled with money: for the reader will recollect that he had received a thousand-pound-note in the morning from the unknown lady of the masquerade. At least three hundred pounds of this sum he lost in about half-an-hour; and then suddenly flinging down the dice box, he said to his friend, "Come, Saxondale—I have had enough of this. Let us be off."

Sallying forth from the gambling-house, the two young noblemen visited the cider-cellars — then looked in at the *Coal Hole*—and subsequently bestowed the honour of their presence upon three or four other places of the same sort,—Lord Harold everywhere drinking immoderately. At two o'clock in the morning they wound up their amusements with a supper of devilled kidneys and Welch-rabbits at *Evans's* in Covent Garden; and then they separated, Lord Saxondale going home uncommonly tipsy in a cab, and Lord Harold Staunton proceeding to Jermyn Street on foot, that the fresh air of the morning might cool his heated brows. Not that he himself was intoxicated. He could always imbibe with impunity a large quantity of liquor; and though within the last few hours he had partaken of far more than even on such occasions he was wont to do, yet he scarcely felt the effects thereof.

On entering his lodgings he bade Alfred — to whom he had confidentially communicated the pending duel—call him precisely at five o'clock: he then threw himself, dressed as he was, upon the bed, and sank into a troubled and agitated sleep.

But we must now transport the reader's attention to Mr. Forster's rooms in the Albany, and suppose that the hour of five in the morning was being proclaimed from all the steeples of the West End. Punctual to his appointment, William Deveril made his appearance. Forester grasped him cordially by the hand, and surveyed him earnestly to see how he bore the prospect of the life-and-death affair about

to take place. The young artist seemed as cool and collected as ever; and a stranger gazing upon him would not have known that there was anything unusual in his mind. He was dressed with his usual neatness, and appeared as if he had enjoyed several hours of calm and refreshing sleep.

An excellent breakfast was served up, of which Deveril partook. When it was over Mr. Forester looked at his watch, saying, "It is now half-past five—my carriage will be at the door in ten minutes. If you have anything particular to say, you had better do so at once."

"I have but one request to make,' answered Deveril, producing a small key from his pocket. "Take this—it opens the writing-desk at my lodgings. If I fall, you will know what to do."

"Depend upon it, my dear fellow," returned Forester, "whatever your instructions are they shall be fully and faithfully attended to. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing," responded Deveril, "except to express my thanks for your kindness."

Mr. Forester's valet entered the room to announce that the carriage was in waiting. That gentleman now produced from a cupboard an ominous-looking box in a green baize bag; and this the valet at once conveyed down to the carriage. Forester and Deveril followed, and took their seats in the vehicle, which then drove rapidly away.

During the ride to Hampstead the two gentlemen conversed upon indifferent matters; and Deveril showed that young as he was—being, as the reader is aware, scarcely twenty, though he looked a year or two older—he possessed a firm and courageous mind. Not that he treated the matter with unbecoming flippancy—very far from it: there was a certain gravity and sedateness in his mien and tone which became the position wherein he was placed, but which was as far removed from the sentiment of fear as it was from levity.

On reaching the heath, Forester and Deveril left the carriage, which drove away to a distance so as not to excite suspicion in the neighbourhood; and they proceeded on foot to the appointed place. Forester had purposely put on a loose over-coat that he might carry the pistol-case concealed beneath it: for the ominous-looking box before referred to, was the one containing the deadly weapons. It was twenty minutes past six as they entered the field where the duel was to take place; and the quick glance which Forester threw around showed him that they were first upon the ground.

It was a beautiful morning: the sun was already shining brightly—the birds were singing in the trees—and nature, reviving from the lethargy of night, was arraying herself in her most cheerful smiles, Deveril could not help heaving a sigh as he reflected how perverse was the heart of man, that by its passions it could lead to the desecration of a world which the Creator had made so fair and beautiful, and the sunny joyousness of which too often formed so strong a contrast with the deeds enacted by its human denizens.

His meditations were however cut short by a sudden ejaculation from the lips of Forester, who cried out, "Here they come!"—and Deveril, looking in the direction where his friend's eyes were fixed, beheld his opponent accompanied by two individuals advancing across the field.

Lord Harold Staunton, ere quitting his lodgings, had made certain hasty improvements in his toilet: nevertheless his appearance was not altogether characterised by the same degree of neatness as that of William Deveril. On the contrary, he looked as if he had passed a portion of the night in a debauch. His companions were Captain Lennox and the military surgeon. The former was a fine tall man, of commanding appearance, and evidently of great physical strength; he wore a moustache, which together with his thick brows and keen piercing eyes, gave him a certain fierceness of look; while his air was haughty, self-sufficient, and aristocratic. As for the surgeon, he was altogether of an opposite appearance—being short and stout, with a rubicund face and a particularly red nose, as if he were amazingly addicted to the pleasures of the table.

Lord Harold bowed with distant politeness to Mr. Deveril, who returned the salutation in a similar manner. The two seconds—namely, Captain Lennox and Mr. Forester—almost instantaneously proceeded to a settlement of the preliminaries,—measuring the ground, and loading the pistols in each other's presence,—during which proceeding the military surgeon walked apart, and while pretending to blow his nose, applied a brandy-flask to his lips. The seconds, having made their arrangements, placed their principals in their proper stations; and thus, to use Captain Lennox's military phrase, "the ground was made clear for action!"

"You have nothing more to say to me beyond the instructions already given?" inquired Mr. Forester of Deveril, as he handed him a loaded pistol.

"Nothing," was the answer, returned in a tone of grave firmness.

"Then there need be no farther delay," rejoined Mr. Forester. "It is arranged that Captain Lennox will give the signal. Observe where he has now taken his place with a white kerchief in his hand. When he drops that kerchief, you will avert your head, raise the pistol, and fire."

Deveril intimated that he understood these instructions; and Mr. Forester drew aside to a little distance, so as to avoid the chance of receiving Lord Harold's bullet. This nobleman had in the meantime received his weapon from Captain Lennox, who had immediately after posted himself in such a position that he formed with the two duellists the apex of a triangle. The military doctor had seated himself under a hedge, where he regaled himself with a second dose of the contents of the brandy-flask to settle the qualms of an empty stomach.

Everything was now ready: but just at the very instant that Captain Lennox was about to let the handkerchief fall, a loud stentorian voice roared out, "Stop!"

All eyes being turned in the direction whence this command emanated, the unmistakable figure of Mr. Gunthorpe was seen clambering over a gate in the hedge close by where the doctor was seated. Up jumped the medical gentleman, as much startled as if a whole posse of policemen had appeared upon the spot: but on perceiving that the new comer was alone, he regained his self-possession, and deliberately took a third pull at the brandy-flask. Over the gate did Mr. Gunthorpe scramble,

—his naturally red face being quite purple with excitement, while the perspiration rolled in large drops down it; and his brown scratch wig had got turned all awry under his broad-brimmed hat. He brandished his gold-headed cane as if it were a constable's staff, and rolled along on his little fat legs towards the spot where the duellists and their seconds stood.

"Who the deuce is this?" exclaimed Captain Lennox, twirling his moustache. "I suppose it's some justice of the peace——"

"No, sir," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe, who had just arrived near enough to catch the remark. "I do not come in a magisterial capacity——"

"I should think not indeed!" observed Lord Harold contemptuously. "Magistrates and county-justices don't usually take up their quarters at a boiled-beef house on Holborn Hill."

"This affair can proceed no farther," said Mr. Gunthorpe, bestowing not the slightest heed upon Lord Harold Staunton's insolent observation: but placing himself midway between the two duellists' he said, "I did not choose to involve you all in exposure by bringing the police authorities with me: but I am nevertheless determined to put a stop to this business. So if you mean to fire, gentlemen, I must become your target."

William Deveril had started with astonishment on seeing Mr. Gunthorpe; and Forester, observing the effect thus produced by that gentleman's presence, hastily inquired of Deveril if he knew who he was?

"Yes—I do indeed know who he is; and have every reason to do so," responded the young artist. "He is one to whom I am under many obligations. But it is most provoking that he should have found us out!"

"Oh! he must not be allowed to interfere in this way," added Forester. "I will see what Lennox says."

He and the Captain thereupon accosted Mr. Gunthorpe, and asked him by what right he strove to put a stop to this affair of honour?

"An affair of honour do you call it!" exclaimed the old gentleman indignantly and scornfully. "I pronounce it to be an affair of *dis*honour——"

"Beware, sir, what you say!" interrupted Captain Lennox fiercely: "for with that remark you impeach the characters of all concerned—and if you dare repeat your insolence, I shall be compelled to pull your nose for you."

"It is a great pity, sir," rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe, "that the people should have to pay taxes to maintain a set of military bullies of whom you are a very fair specimen."

"By Jove, this is too much!" ejaculated Captain Lennox. "I must chastise you, sir."

"And I will knock you down with my cane, if you dare touch me," at once retorted Mr. Gunthorpe, holding his stick in a manner which showed that he was serious.

"Don't hurt the old gentleman," said Mr. Forester, seizing the arm of Captain Lennox who was about to commit a prompt onslaught on Mr. Gunthorpe. "Let us endeavour to reason with him."

"You will not reason me into giving my consent to this duel," observed the object of the remark. "And so you call it an affair of honour, do you? What! is it honourable for two young men to stand up and endeavour to take each other's life, for some trumpery cause or another?"

"Permit me to ask," interrupted Mr. Forester, "whether you are acquainted with the motives and causes which have led to the present meeting?"

"No—I am not," at once rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe; "and what is more, I do not want to know them. It is sufficient for me that by an accident I ascertained what was going to take place; and so I hastened off to prevent it."

"I will tell you what we must do," exclaimed Captain Lennox: "we must tie the old fellow to yon gate, or else to a tree."

"Yes—that's the way to dispose of him," said Lord Harold, who for the last two or three minutes had not been mingling in the conversation.

"No," said Deveril, now advancing towards the group in the middle of the ground: "I will permit no indignity to be offered to Mr. Gunthorpe. At the same time I must earnestly represent to Mr. Gunthorpe himself, that he will see the impropriety of persevering in his attempt to stop this proceeding."

"What! such words as these from *your* lips, William Deveril?" said the old gentleman reproachfully.

"My dear sir," responded the young artist, "I have admitted to Mr. Forester that I am acquainted with you—and your presence here may therefore be construed in a light prejudicial to my character."

"Oh! they will say that you were afraid to fight, and that you got a friend to stop the duel—will they?" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "Well then, I pledge my honour that such is not the case. Indeed, it was quite in another way I learnt what was going on——"

"We are not bound to believe you, sir," remarked Captain Lennox stiffly; "and therefore, as Mr Deveril has observed, you will only prejudice his honour by persisting in your interruption."

"Nevertheless, I do persist," said Mr. Gunthorpe resolutely.

"Then, sir, we must remove you by force," at once rejoined the Captain: and with a sudden movement he wrenched the gold-headed cane out of Mr. Gunthorpe's hands.

He and Forester together, then dragged the old gentleman off towards the gate, which they managed to do despite his struggles and resistance.

"Deveril—William Deveril!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, in accents of mingled anger and reproach: "is it possible that you stand idly by and see this indignity committed? What, sir! you do not move?—I am ashamed of you!—I am astonished at you! After all——But I will have nothing more to do with you. Lord Harold, you too shall smart for permitting this! Will you not help me? Oh! you refuse, do you? Well, mind what you are about! You will repent it, I say—you will repent it! Deveril, you declared you would not see me ill-treated—and yet you—you——"

While thus giving vent to broken ejaculations, poor Mr. Gunthorpe, breathless and exhausted with his cries and his struggles, was hurried up to the gate; and there Captain Lennox and Mr. Forester bound him securely to the rails with their handkerchiefs. Lord Harold laughed contemptuously at

the old gentleman's threats: but William Deveril stood with his arms folded, his looks bent down, his face pale, and his lips white and quivering. He said not a word; and yet it was evident that he deeply felt the indignity offered to Mr. Gunthorpe.

The Captain and Mr. Forester, having done their work, hastened back to the measured ground in order to hurry on the proceedings as quick as possible, so as to prevent farther interruption. The military surgeon walked up to Mr. Gunthorpe, who was struggling desperately to emancipate himself from his bonds; and producing his brandy-flask, he offered to pour some down the captive's throat, "in order to soothe him." But Mr. Gunthorpe bade him begone with such fierce indignation, that the doctor did not persist in his proposal.

Meanwhile Captain Lennox had resumed his former position, with the white handkerchief ready to drop: Lord Harold and William Deveril again found themselves confronted according to the laws of honour—the signal was given—but only one pistol was fired. That one was Lord Harold Staunton's. Deveril however stood unhurt.

"You did not fire, sir!" exclaimed Captain Lennox to the young artist.

"It was not my intention," was the latter's cold but firm reply. "It was not I who provoked this duel——"

"Enough! say nothing, Deveril!" interrupted Mr. Forester. "I presume that Lord Harold Staunton is now satisfied?" he added, turning towards that individual.

The young nobleman hesitated what reply to give. His better feelings prompted him to answer in the affirmative: but the empire which the lady of the masquerade had acquired over him, became paramount—he felt that to obtain the crowning favour of her love he must prosecute the murderous game still farther—and his decision was therefore taken accordingly.

"I cannot consider it an act of bravery on Mr Deveril's part to abstain from firing," he said: "but I choose to regard it as a proof that he was resolved to avoid the chance of a second exchange of shots. Therefore I am not satisfied."

"We must proceed, Mr. Forester," said Captain Lennox, with cold-blooded laconism.

"This is nothing short of downright savage butchery and barbarous murder!" vociferated Mr. Gunthorpe, now struggling more desperately than ever to extricate himself from his bonds. "Deveril —Lord Harold——"

But here the old gentleman's throat became so dry with excitement and hoarseness, that his voice failed him and he could say no more.

Fresh pistols had in the meanwhile been handed to Lord Harold Staunton and William Deveril—Captain Lennox again took his post—the signal with the white handkerchief was given—and a sharp report rang through the morning air. Again was it Lord Harold's weapon that was alone fired: but this time not without effect—for Deveril dropped upon the grass!

"You have murdered him!" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, now suddenly recovering his voice: and with a superhuman effort he broke away from the gate to which he had been bound.

The military surgeon was already rushing to the spot where Forester and Lennox were raising Mr. Deveril. Lord Harold, much agitated, likewise lent his assistance. The young man's eyes were closed—his shirt and waistcoat over his right breast were already saturated with blood—his lips moved not—the breath of life appeared to waver there no more!

"Fly, fly!" exclaimed the military surgeon: "he is dead; It is useless for you to remain."

"Dead! My God, is it possible? Dead! no—no!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, who now reached the spot: and falling upon his knees, he bent over the inanimate form of William Deveril.

"Here, sir," said Mr. Forester. "You are innocent of any hand in all this—take that key—it opens a desk at poor Deveril's lodgings—and there you will find certain instructions to be fulfilled. For God's sake, do not neglect them."

Thus speaking, Forester thrust the key into the hands of Mr. Gunthorpe, who was sobbing and weeping over the young artist as if his heart would break. Forester then sped away, along with Lord Harold Staunton and Captain Lennox,—Mr. Gunthorpe and the surgeon alone remaining with him who had fallen in the duel.

It must not however be thought that Forester meant to leave them to manage as they might in the matter. He made straight for the spot where he was to meet his carriage, and ordered it to proceed as near to the field as it possibly could get—likewise giving instructions to his domestics that they were to hurry to the scene, render what assistance they were able in removing the body into the vehicle, and then hold themselves entirely at the orders of Mr. Gunthorpe. Having done this, Forester rejoined Lord Harold and Captain Lennox, and hastened away with them in their own vehicle.

CHAPTER XLI.

MORE SCENES AT SAXONDALE HOUSE.

It was about half-past ten o'clock at night, when the tall form of a man, with a hat slouched over his countenance, and muffled in a cloak, advanced hurriedly up Park Lane. Considering that it was the middle of summer, it was doubtless somewhat singular for an individual to be thus apparelled; and such a superfluity as a capacious mantle could only be for the purpose of disguise. So thought the policeman who was sauntering leisurely down the street: but in that aristocratic quarter the constable could not think of interfering with the object of his notice. He set it down as some affair of gallantry, and proceeded on his way.

The muffled figure stopped at the door of Saxondale House—knocked and rang—and during the few moments that elapsed ere his summons was answered, appeared excessively impatient and nervous. The door was however soon opened; and at once entering the hall, he himself, anticipating the functions of the porter, shut the door quickly; then removing his hat, he revealed the countenance of Lord Harold Staunton. He likewise threw off his cloak,—at the same time saying in an agitated manner to the porter, "Of course you know what has occurred? Hence this disguise! Is Lord Saxondale at home?"

"No, my lord—he is not," was the reply.

Lord Harold appeared to hesitate—and then said, "Do you know where he is?"

Again the answer was in the negative, accompanied by the intimation that Lord Saxondale had been absent the whole day.

"Perhaps her ladyship knows?" immediately rejoined Harold: "and she will tell me—for it is highly important that I should see my friend. Is her ladyship within?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the porter.

"And alone—disengaged? But perhaps the young ladies are with her?"

"No, my lord: they are gone to a party, and her ladyship is alone."

The hall-porter, to whose ears certain flying rumours of the duel had been wafted, was at no loss to understand wherefore Staunton had come thus disguised, nor why his looks were wild and haggard. But he of course made no remark in allusion to the subject; and forthwith summoning a footman, desired him to escort Lord Harold to the room where Lady Saxondale was seated. This was accordingly done; and in a few moments the young nobleman found himself alone with her ladyship.

"Perhaps you did not expect to see me here to-night?" he said, throwing himself upon a seat near the sofa where Lady Saxondale was placed.

"Indeed I did not," she answered coldly; "and I am much surprised that you should come at this hour and under such circumstances."

"You are surprised?" ejaculated Staunton, now gazing upon her with amazement the most unfeigned. "Have I not fulfilled your injunctions?——yes, even to the very letter!"

"My lord," answered Lady Saxondale, haughtily, but still with some degree of astonishment, "I am at a loss to understand you. Reports of what happened this morning have reached me, and I therefore can come to no other conclusion than that your reason is affected."

"Lady Saxondale," cried Staunton, starting up from his seat as if goaded almost to madness by this unlooked-for reception, "is it possible that you can treat me in such a manner? Now, do not think that though I may seem excited I have in any way compromised you with the servants: for I purposely asked after Edmund first, and appeared to wish to see *you* only as the result of a second thought and for the purpose of ascertaining where Edmund is."

"Compromise me with my servants!" said Lady Saxondale, slowly rising from the sofa; and drawing herself up to the full of her superb height, she bent her magnificent dark eyes with eagle look upon the astounded young nobleman: "I am at a loss, my lord, to understand such language. Think you that because your sister is engaged to become my son's wife, that you possess the privilege of having the run of the house—to enter it at such an hour as this—force your way into my presence——No, my lord!"

Harold had remained stupified while Lady Saxondale was thus speaking: but when she ceased, a sudden rage seized upon him, quick as the gust of the whirlwind sweeps over the ocean; and while his eyes flashed fire and his lips were white with rage, he said in a thick hoarse voice, "Madam, your conduct is abominable!"

"This to me?" cried Lady Saxondale: and she reached her hand towards the bell-pull.

"No!" ejaculated Staunton: "you must not add this crowning ignominy—or I will kill you—by the eternal heaven, I will kill you!"

Lady Saxondale seemed suddenly dismayed, and her countenance became pale: but speedily recovering herself, she said, "It is but too evident that the calamity of this morning has turned your brain. I must not therefore be too hard upon you."

Thus speaking, she resumed her seat, with a slight relaxation from that cold dignity and freezing hauteur which for the last few minutes she had maintained. Lord Harold, still standing, fixed upon her the keenest scrutiny, as if to fathom what was really passing in her mind, and penetrate beneath the mask of studied reserve and repelling chillness which he fancied she had purposely put on. But at length resuming his own seat likewise, he said, "You have alluded to the calamity of this morning. Can you look me in the face and tell me that you really regard it as a calamity?"

"What!" cried Lady Saxondale: "to kill a person in a duel—is not this a calamity?"

"Stop!" said Lord Harold imperiously. "Does your ladyship know this?"—and he produced the diamond-clasp which he had worn on the front of his cap at the masquerade.

"No—certainly not," responded Lady Saxondale, just deigning to fling one glance upon the jewel.

"Nor this?" continued Lord Harold Staunton, next producing the letter which made the appointment for that self-same masquerade.

"What a question!" cried Lady Saxondale with a contemptuous curl of the lip. "As if I knew aught of your correspondence!"

"Then perhaps your ladyship is equally ignorant of this?"—and now he produced the letter which contained naught save a name—and that name was *William Deveril!*

"My lord, I begin to grow very weary indeed of these follies. I have put up with them for the last ten minutes out of compassion for your state of mind: but I must beg that they be not persevered in."

"Lady Saxondale," answered Lord Harold Staunton, with a strange and ominous outward calmness which rather denoted than concealed the pent-up fury of wrath and rage concentrated below: "it suits your purpose to treat me thus—but you will not succeed! No: it shall not be permitted to any woman to make use of me as her blind instrument for a particular object, and when that object is accomplished, cast me off. Nay, worse than cast me off—ignore my services and repudiate me altogether! Madam, it was *you* who sent me that clasp—*you* who wrote that letter—*you* also who penned that name inside the envelope, which moreover contained a certain sum of money."

"Lord Harold, your friends will have to put you under restraint," responded Lady Saxondale.

"We shall see!" he rejoined drily. "Now, madam, you are giving me proof of the most matchless effrontery that ever woman displayed or that the world saw. Can you possibly maintain that it was not you yourself who gave me the appointment to be at the masquerade—you who enjoined me to remove your enemy from your path—you who wrote me the name of that enemy on this paper, that name being William Deveril? Madam,

no earthly conjecture could I form as to who Queen Isabella of Spain might be, until the morning after the masquerade But when I received this missive mentioning the name of the enemy with whom I was to seek a quarrel, provoke to a duel, and thus extirpate from your path, my suspicions instantaneously fixed themselves upon you. Suspicions? —no! It was a certainty—a conviction, beyond the possibility of doubt. And could you yourself have been so insensate as to hope that I should not fathom your secret? Why, all London was ringing with the affair between William Deveril and yourself. He had insulted you—at least such was your story—and at all events you had taken the trouble to make the round of your acquaintances and spread the intelligence. There was a malignity in this conduct on your part which showed a determination to ruin William Deveril. What cause subsequently impelled you to wish his destruction, I know not: but that the Lady Saxondale to whom I am now speaking, was the Queen Isabella of Spain who gave me my mission at Harcourt House, I felt assured the moment I read the name of her enemy."

"I have listened to you in silence, if not with patience," said her ladyship, "because I was desirous to ascertain the real nature of the delusion under which you are labouring. I now begin to fathom it. You have mistaken some one else for me."

"No—it is not so!" answered Lord Harold vehemently. "I repeat that not until I read the name of your enemy, did I suspect who Queen Isabella of Spain could possibly be. But the instant that name met my eyes, I knew that it was Lady Saxondale. Yes—not merely because you had notoriously some strong cause of dislike against Deveril, but also because she who personated the Spanish Queen was of your stature—of your form —with the same dark eyes flashing from behind the mask—yes, and with the same accents of the voice, despite the consummate art with which that voice was disguised! Lady Saxondale, if it were the last words that I had to speak in this life, it would be to proclaim to your face that you were the woman who urged me to this deed of assassination!"

"Did I not firmly entertain the belief that your reason is impared, I should not tolerate such conduct. Even as it is, I know not whether I am justified in permitting you to remain another instant in my presence!"—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, it was with a look so well corresponding with her words that for an instant Lord Harold Staunton felt himself staggered.

But only for an instant! The doubt vanished as quickly as it came, giving place to a conviction stronger than ever; and he said with a fiercer look and in a hoarser voice than before, "Lady Saxondale, I have become a murderer for your sake! The death of that young man sits heavy upon my heart: my conscience is a nest of scorpions. Oh! what I have done and what I now suffer, demand an immense reward! That reward you promised me: that reward you shall give! It may be that your love-tale—which I was foolish enough to believe at the time, and have believed since until I stood in your presence ere now,—it may be, I say, that this tale of love was but the coinage of your brain—an artful delusion adopted in order to model me to your purposes. Infatuated fool that I was, to put faith in it! Yet who would not have done so? who could have believed that there was treachery so foul—so damnable—in the heart of woman? But no matter. I *did* believe it: else never should I have suffered myself to become the instrument of your designs—never should I have availed myself of the opportunity which an unlooked-for accident furnished to provoke William Deveril to the duel of death. If you had really loved me, your love, Lady Saxondale, would have been some consolation for the crime I have committed and for the remorse which fastened its vulture-talons upon my soul the instant that deed was done! But if you do not love me—and if you sought to make me alike the instrument of your vengeance and the sport of your trickery, only to repudiate me afterwards, and perhaps laugh at me in secret—I will still demand my recompense ——that I may be avenged on you! Madam, do you understand me?"

"I understand," was the patrician lady's response, "that I have a madman for my companion at this moment—and that if I thus bear patiently and kindly with him, it is only from compassion for his misfortune."

"Compassion? I scorn the word—I disdain to become the object of such a sentiment! Look you, Lady Saxondale—I am a desperate man. In a few short hours an immense change has been effected within me. Hitherto I have been the dissipated rake—the reckless *roué*—the inconsiderate spendthrift; but now I have become the deep criminal—the man who bears about with him a remorse as the convict carries with him his chain. Aye—and the iron of that remorse is eating into my soul more deeply and with a more corroding agony than the iron of the chain can eat into the convict's flesh. What consolation, then, is there for me? A mad and a reckless career, composed of all the intoxicating influences that can drown thought, or the wild ecstacies and thrilling delights that can absorb reflection! Wine and women—deep draughts of wine and the glowing embrace of superb and impassioned women—these are the only blandishments left for me! Into this catalogue do you enter: it is you who must head it—thereby fulfilling the promise that you gave!"

"Poor young man!" said Lady Saxondale, shaking her head: "what will become of you? As one whom I have known for a long time—as my son's bosom friend—as the brother of his future wife—and as the nephew of the esteemed and respected Lady Macdonald, I am bound to entertain some degree of sympathy for you. Besides, you appear to feel so deeply the calamity of this morning——"

"Oh, talk to me not thus!" ejaculated Harold, with rage upon his countenance. "If I am not mad already, you will drive me so. By heaven, you are grandly beautiful! I always considered you as eminently handsome; and since yesterday morning, when I first knew that you were the lady of the masquerade, I have feasted my imagination upon your charms. Yet never did they seem so magnificent as at this moment! Even in this very conduct which you are pursuing towards me—treacherous, ungrateful, and abominable as it is—there is something so tantalizing that I could scarcely wish it to be otherwise. It is the acrid olive

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giving flavour to the rich juice of the grape:"—and Lord Harold Staunton laughed wildly, almost with a maniac laugh, as he thus spoke.

"Now let this interview end," said Lady Saxondale, rising from the sofa: and despite the calm and dignified reserve, mingled with a slight expression of pity, which she wore outwardly, she was evidently not free from alarm within.

"Is it possible that you are serious and sternly resolved in treating me thus?" cried Lord Harold, in a wild mournful voice. "Woman, I have become a murderer for your sake! Yes—I tell you again that I knew it was *you* the instant I received the letter containing the name yesterday morning. And knowing it to be *you*, I did not to-day engage your son as my second—I did not even communicate to him the fact that a duel was pending. See, then, all the consideration I have manifested, in addition to the crime which I have perpetrated on your behalf! And now——"

"I say, my lord," interrupted Lady Saxondale, "that this inverview must end!"

"No—the interview cannot end: but the foolish and insensate portion of it shall!" exclaimed Lord Harold: and with wide-extended arms, he sprang forward to clasp Lady Saxondale in his embrace.

A half-suppressed shriek escaped her lips as she retreated to the bell-pull: but at that very instant the door flew open, and in rushed Mabel the housekeeper, her countenance purple with rage.

"Save me—save me, Mabel, from this maniac!" cried Lady Saxondale, as if joyously catching at the circumstance of the woman's opportune appearance, and not choosing to notice her wrathful looks.

"Eh—what?" screamed forth Mabel. "Lord Harold, who killed Deveril this morning! He here!"—and the woman looked unfeignedly astonished.

Lord Harold's extended arms dropped to his sides as if paralysed. He stood confounded for a few moments, uncertain how to act. He dared not pursue his present object any farther: for all in an instant it flashed to him that if a disturbance were created in the house, it might end by his falling into the hands of justice—and he by no means relished the idea of being committed to Newgate to take his trial for the disastrous issue of the duel. He therefore saw the necessity of yielding to circumstances; and advancing towards Lady Saxondale, he said in a quick hoarse whisper, "We shall speedily meet again:"—then rushing past Mabel, he quitted the room, and soon afterwards the house.

"Your coming was most fortunate," said Lady Saxondale, endeavouring to make the incident itself available for the use of language to propitiate the woman. "I do most sincerely thank you."

"Thank me, indeed! there's nothing to thank me for," cried Mabel. "I didn't come for that: how did I know what was going on? And really," she added, with a sneer, "your ladyship seems to be very unfortunate just at present: everybody is persecuting you with love-overtures. First poor Deveril, who has been killed: secondly, this Staunton, who killed him! It's really a strange coincidence! But it wasn't for *that* I came: 'twas to tell you that things are getting every day worse and worse with me. The conduct of the servants is unbearable."

"What has happened now, Mabel?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"What's happened? Why, that hussey the laundry-maid says she isn't to take her orders from me: and there's the butler just refused me a bottle of cordial, saying I must get your order. Of course they are encouraged to do this. They see how that jackanapes Edmund treats me—how that minx Juliana behaves to me——but I won't put up with it; and now I am going to have things settled."

"In what way, Mabel? in what way?" asked Lady Saxondale, gradually becoming deeply grave and ominously reflective.

"Oh! I will soon tell you what I mean," rejoined the housekeeper insolently. "I will have you summon the whole of the servants up into this room within the hour that's passing——yes, this night I mean—and you will tell them all that you insist upon their obeying me just as they do yourself. Now, that's what I will have done without any more delay."

"Well, Mabel, whatever you desire shall be done," answered Lady Saxondale in a deeper and more subdued tone than she was wont to adopt. "But allow me to suggest that it will be more dignified on your part if you appear quite cool and collected in the presence of the assembled servants."

"Oh! then you don't object to what I propose?" said the housekeeper, considerably mollified by Lady Saxondale's conciliatory words. "All I want is to be put on a proper footing——"

"And so you shall be, Mabel," at once replied her ladyship. "I do indeed perceive now that your authority is not sufficiently established. I will call all the servants together, and give them such instructions as shall satisfy you for the future. But when I think of it," she added, glancing towards the time-piece on the mantel, "it is somewhat late to take such an important step to-night. It is half-past eleven. Some of the servants may already be in bed—those who get up earliest in the morning. Suppose I do what you wish immediately after breakfast? That is the better time for settling domestic matters."

"Well, since your ladyship takes such a just and proper view of the matter," observed Mabel, now completely appeased, "I think it would be better to wait till the morning"

"And I tell you what you shall do, Mabel," continued Lady Saxondale. "In order to give greater effect to the proceeding, it shall appear as if you had really been making serious complaints to me; and I will read the whole of the servants such a humiliating lecture in your presence, that they shall never dare dispute your authority again."

"I was always sure that you would not see your faithful servant ill-treated," rejoined Mabel, who began to feel all the love of former days revive towards her mistress. "I shall now sleep comfortably to-night—which I have not done for a very long time. Good night, my lady—God bless your ladyship!"

"Good night, Mabel—I hope you *will* sleep comfortably."

The housekeeper left the room; and as the door closed behind her, a gloomy look gradually settled upon the countenance of Lady Saxondale—a look as ominous in its expression as that which she wore on the last occasion of her quarrel with Mabel, and which was related in a recent chapter.

It was past midnight when the carriage returned with Juliana and Constance, who had been to a

party. They came home very much fatigued, and at once retired to their own apartments. Edmund did not make his appearance; for since his intimacy with Emily Archer he seldom slept at Saxondale House, but was plunging headlong into dissipations and extravagances of every kind.

Soon after her daughters' return, Lady Saxondale repaired to her own chamber; and by one o'clock silence prevailed throughout the mansion.

In the morning some surprise was experienced by the domestics when the clock struck nine and Mabel had not made her appearance in the servants' hall. In consequence of her restless spirit and her ever-recurring anxiety to assert her authority, she invariably rose at a much earlier hour, and was wont to be down by at least seven o'clock, finding fault with everything, quarrelling with everybody—being contented with no one, and discovering naught to her satisfaction. It was therefore a relief to the servants generally that she was so late on the present occasion. Her lateness however naturally engendered surprise, for the reasons explained. Half-past nine—then ten o'clock—and still no Mabel. Surprise increased to alarm: but none of the female-servants chose to ascend to her room to see if she were ill, or ascertain the cause of her non-appearance, inasmuch as there was the risk of receiving a terrific scolding for what might be regarded by the ill-tempered woman as an intrusion. It was however thought right to let Lady Saxondale know that Mabel had not as yet come down stairs.

Her ladyship was seated at breakfast with her two daughters when this intelligence was conveyed to her. It was Mary-Anne, the handsome maid, who brought in the announcement; and Lady Saxondale bade her go up-stairs and knock at Mabel's door,—adding, "Perhaps the poor creature is ill."

The lady's-maid did not dare disobey this command: and perhaps she, of all the female servants of the household, stood least in awe of Mabel—her confidential position with her young mistresses giving her a certain stability in her place not enjoyed by the others. She accordingly proceeded to Mabel's chamber: but in a few minutes she came hurrying back into the breakfast-parlour, with a countenance pale as death and her looks expressive of terror and dismay.

"What, in heaven's name, is the matter?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"Mabel—Mabel is dead!" replied Mary-Anne, now recovering the faculty of speech, which in her horror she had temporarily lost.

"Dead!" echoed Lady Saxondale, starting from her seat. "Poor Mabel dead! With all her faults she was an attached and faithful servant."

Thus speaking, her ladyship hurried from the room, followed by her daughters and Mary-Anne; and speeding up to the housekeeper's chamber, they saw at a first glance enough to confirm the maid's statement. Yes—Mabel was dead. Rigid, cold, and white, she lay stretched on her couch! Lady Saxondale placed her hand upon the face of the corpse, and immediately said, "It is like ice! She has been dead for many hours. Poor creature! it must have been apoplexy."

The intelligence soon spread throughout the mansion that Mabel had died in the night: but we must candidly inform the reader that no particular grief was testified by any of the domestics. Lady Saxondale however appeared much distressed by the occurrence; and Constance likewise shed tears—for she could not help recollecting that in her girlhood she had been an object of especial favour with Mabel, before the temper of the latter had grown so sour and disagreeable as of late years it was.

As for Juliana, she neither experienced any sorrow nor chose to affect it.

In the course of the day an inquest was held upon the body. The medical men declared it to be a case of apoplexy; and a verdict of "Died by the visitation of God," was accordingly returned. For there was not the slightest sign or evidence to indicate that Mabel had committed suicide; and as for foul play, who could possibly have dreamt of such a thing within the aristocratic walls of Saxondale House?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE BILLET.

We must now return to Henrietta Leyden. Three days had elapsed since that memorable night on which her attempted escape, in company with the strange haggard figure in the loose dressing-gown, had been so suddenly frustrated. During this interval she had seen nothing more of Lord Everton, and therefore concluded that he had either been called away elsewhere by business, or that he was allowing her time to recover from the effects of that scene of excitement ere he renewed his persecutions. She still continued to occupy the same suite of apartments, Susan the servant-woman attending upon her as heretofore. She saw nothing of Mrs. Martin, and her existence during those three days was thus unvaried by a single occurrence worthy of note.

That there was a secret door opening through the wall into her bed-chamber, she had been made aware by the incidents of the night just alluded to: but so admirably was this door fitted into its setting, that it was no wonder if it had all along escaped her notice until that occasion when its existence was revealed to her. She remembered sufficient of its whereabouts to search for it on the following morning; and she then discovered how skilfully it was contrived so as to defy detection when shut. The paper of the room was of a pattern having large squares to represent the wood-work of wainscotting, and was likewise of an oaken colour and well varnished. It was marked with lines to represent the framework of panellings; and the secret door was so artfully managed that it formed as it were two of the squares (one above the other) of the paper-pattern. The numerous lines, both perpendicular and transverse, which tinted the paper, concealed the traces of the door's configuration, and absorbed as it were all marks of its existence. As a matter of course the door fitted with the utmost accuracy and tightness; and altogether it was so well concealed that it was no wonder if it had escaped Henrietta's notice when in the first instance she had searched her chamber to ascertain if there were any secret means of gaining admission thereto. But now that she had been made aware of the existence of that door, and knew where to look for it, she could just distinguish its outlines on the paper.

On each of the three nights which had elapsed since the memorable one of her frustrated attempt to escape, she had not occupied the bed-chamber, but had slept upon the sofa in the drawing-room, carefully locking the doors of communication. The reader may be assured that she had over and over again examined the walls of this apartment to assure herself against the existence of any other secret door; and having now the experience of the former discovery to guide her, she was better able to come to a positive conclusion on the point. So far, therefore, as it was possible to judge from all she knew, and from the most scrutinizing survey frequently reiterated, she felt confident that in respect to a secret means of communication with the drawing-room she was safe enough.

Need we pause to say how profound was the unhappiness of the young maiden at this prolonged captivity, or what torturing reflections she experienced when fixing her thoughts upon home? Her position appeared to be entirely hopeless: the place of her imprisonment was as well secured as any gaol could possibly be; and moreover she had learnt enough to make her aware that its ostensible purpose was that of a lunatic-asylum. She knew full well therefore that if she exhausted herself in shrieks, and screams, and cries for succour, all would be unavailing. What, then, was to become of her? Must she indeed resign herself to the horrible conviction that Lord Everton would triumph at last, and that she could never hope to go forth from those walls except dishonoured and undone?

Truly, the young maiden had sufficient topics for her thoughts, not only in immediate connexion with herself, but likewise in respect to the mysterious adventure of that memorable night. Who could the individual be that had come to her rescue, and had endeavoured to accomplish her escape and his own? Was he indeed some unfortunate lunatic confined within those walls? or was there some deeper and darker mystery attached to it? Was he still alive? had he been merely stunned by the blow with which Bellamy had struck him down? or was he killed upon the spot? All these things were beyond the power of conjecture to solve. Certain it was that since that memorable night, Henrietta had heard neither cry nor lamentation to indicate his existence: for that those lamentations and that wild thrilling cry which she had heard on the same night that was so eventful to her, had come from his lips, she would not doubt. But then it was possible that if he still lived he had sunk into a state of quiescence again, or had been removed to some other part of the house whence his lamentations could not reach her.

That he must really be a lunatic she was more than half inclined to believe: for that he had visited her room by means of the private door on those occasions when his presence so much frightened her, was beyond all doubt—but wherefore had he not addressed her at the time of these visits? Wherefore steal into her chamber thus, merely to terrify her as it would seem, and then flit away again? This appeared to be the conduct of one whose reason was indeed unhinged; and therefore, as above stated, she was inclined to adopt the belief that he was really a lunatic.

Hopeless as the poor girl's condition seemed, she nevertheless revolved in her brain a variety of projects for the accomplishment of her escape. Such is ever the case with persons in captivity, although the circumstances of their incarceration may seem to preclude the possibility of success. Oh! if she could escape and return to her mother and little Charley—how happy would she be! Yes: but when she looked at those bars her heart sank within her And yet she went on revolving plan after plan, until she would fall into moods of such fanciful dreaminess that when starting up from these reveries, she was stricken with the dread that her brain was turning and that her reason was becoming affected.

It was on the morning of the fourth day after the night of memorable incidents, that Henrietta arose from her sofa-couch at a very early hour, and proceeded to put into execution something that she had finally resolved upon. It was but a little after five, and the profoundest silence reigned throughout and around the house. The fields were not as yet cheered with the beams of the sun; but they appeared of an emerald brightness in their own natural freshness and with the dew upon them. The reader will recollect that the garden stretched down to a shrubbery standing upon the bank of the New River, and that on the other side of the stream the meadows of the picturesque landscape stretched onward. From her window Henrietta had often seen persons on the opposite bank—some occasionally riding on horseback through the field—and others remaining there to fish. These circumstances had inspired her with the idea which she was now about to put into execution.

She had books in the room, but no writing materials: not so much as a pencil had she at her command—much less pens and ink. But she had already devised a substitute. Scraping some soot from the lower part of the chimney in one of the fire-places, she mixed it with a little water in a tumbler, and thus managed to form an ink which would at all events answer her purpose. From one of the books she tore out a blank leaf; and with a pen-knife which she found in a dressing-case upon the toilet-table, she contrived to fashion a rude but serviceable pen out of a lucifer-match. She then sat down and wrote the following lines:—

"Into whomsoever's hands this may fall, it is earnestly requested that immediate information may be given to the Police-authorities that a young female, named Henrietta Leyden has been forcibly carried off and detained against her will in the house kept by a Mr. Bellamy and generally supposed to be a lunatic asylum. Even if it does really serve such a purpose, it is likewise made available for the perpetration of wrongs, and villanies which require exposure. Let it not be thought that this is the effusion of a maniac. For heaven's sake let not this appeal be disregarded! Whatever be the result, the person finding the billet will at least perform a humane and benevolent act by placing it in the hands of the authorities. Oh, let not this earnest entreaty be disregarded!"

Such were the lines which Henrietta penned by means of her ingeniously-contrived writing materials; and she managed to make the note even more legible than she had at first dared hope or than the agitated state of her feelings seemed to promise.

But now, in what manner was the billet to be conveyed out of the house? Her plan was already settled, even to its minutest details. Her corset afforded some pieces of whalebone, wherewith she promptly formed a bow and an arrow. Having mate-

rials for needlework in the room she was not at a loss for thread wherewith to string her bow. Thus far her task was completed: and opening the window gently, she anxiously waited until some person should appear on the opposite bank of the river. During the interval she measured the distance with her eye—calculated the strength of the bow—and felt assured that it would shoot the arrow to the requisite distance. We need hardly state that the billet she had written was fastened to the end of the arrow.

She did not tarry long in suspense, for to her joy she presently beheld a person mounted upon a dark chesnut steed, riding along the river's bank. She waved her white handkerchief in the hope of attracting the rider's attention; and to her joy she succeeded—for the person reined in his steed, stopped, and gazed towards the house. Then Henrietta discharged the arrow from the bow: and to her still greater joy she beheld it clear the shrubbery and the river, and fall into the field but a few yards from where the horseman stood. The next instant that individual sprang from the steed—picked up the arrow—and read the billet. A white handkerchief was waved as a signal that its contents would be complied with: or at least Henrietta hoped that such was the meaning of the sign. The horseman sprang upon his steed again—cantered along the river's bank—and was soon out of sight.

Henrietta closed the window and burst into tears of joy: for she felt assured that her deliverance would now be accomplished. Oh! wherefore had she not thought of this plan before? It now appeared so simple—so natural—that she was astonished at herself for not having previously adopted it. But better late than never: and clasping her hands in the fervour of rapturous hope, she murmured, "Ah, my dear mother! ere many hours shall have elapsed, you will learn that your daughter did not wilfully fly away to abandon you. And dear Charley too—Oh, how rejoiced shall I be to strain him in my arms once more! But heavens! if this long absence, so utterly unaccountable to my poor dear mother, should have killed her, ill and enfeebled as she was!"

The recurrence of this dreadful thought—a thought which over and over again from the first moment of her captivity had haunted the poor girl—suddenly threw a damp upon the joyousness of hope which a few moments back had filled her soul; and now the tears gushed forth again—but this time they were tears of bitterness!

At the usual hour Susan brought in the breakfast; and towards mid-day Mrs. Martin made her appearance. Henrietta had not seen her since the occurrences of that memorable night so often alluded to; and the flesh crept with a shuddering chill upon her bones, as she found that detested woman again in her presence. It appeared to be ominous of evil; and the young damsel's heart sank within her.

"I dare say you were surprised," said Mrs. Martin, "that I did not come near you: but I thought it better to leave you altogether by yourself for a few days, so that you might have leisure to reflect upon the folly and uselessness of refusing his lordship's overtures. Do I find you in a more pliant mood now?"

"No—ten thousand times no!" answered Henrietta with hysterical vehemence.

"Don't put yourself into a passion," said Mrs. Martin. "You have really no hope except in submission; and you are only quarrelling with your own good fortune by this perverse obstinacy. Perhaps you think that the miserable lunatic who, by finding a means of getting stealthily out of his own chamber, came to your assistance the other night, will prove your champion again? But we have taken precautions against the possibility of such an event. He is in a more secure place now, I can assure you!"

"Then he is not dead? he was not murdered by that brutal blow?" said Henrietta anxiously: for she knew not precisely what was the meaning to be attached to the woman's words.

"Dead—no!" cried Mrs. Martin. "Though Mr. Bellamy struck hard, he did not kill: and besides, that miserable wretch seems to have as many lives as a cat."

"Who is he? what is he?" asked Henrietta, shuddering at the idea of the ill-treatment which the poor unfortunate creature most probably received in that house, and to which the woman's allusion appeared to point.

"Who is he?" said Mrs. Martin: "why, what else could he be but a wretched madman—one however of the cunningest description, I can tell you! Those were his cries you heard and that you talked to me about in the garden—only it did not suit me to be communicative then: but since you have seen the man, there is no necessity to observe any particular mystery with regard to him. However, I did not come to you now to talk on that subject, but to tell you that Lord Everton will be here this evening—and he has intimated his pleasure to sup with you. He hopes that you will receive him in a proper manner. He has suffered much from the blow which the miserable lunatic dealt him the other night; but that is not the only reason why he has abstained from visiting you for three or four days past. He hoped that during this interval you would see the necessity of securing your own happiness and accepting his proposals. What am I to tell him?"

"Tell him?" ejaculated Henrietta, the colour mounting to her pale cheeks: "that until the very death will I resist him! And now let not another word pass between us; for your presence is abhorrent and revolting to me."

"Oh! if this is still your mood," exclaimed Mrs. Martin, tossing her head with mingled rage and contempt, "the sooner you are reduced to submission the better."

With these words she quitted the room, locking the door as usual behind her.

"Oh, wherefore does nobody come?" murmured Henrietta to herself, as the clock of Hornsey church at this instant proclaimed the hour of noon. "Surely there has been time for that gentleman to fulfil the request contained in my letter, if he meant to do it at all. But, alas! he may have reasoned that it was the effusion of a lunatic; or even if he did take it to the authorities, they may have put that construction upon it. Yes—it must be so! Idiot that I was to indulge in such wild hopes. Heavens! it is almost a proof that I am in reality becoming insane!"

Hour after hour passed, and not the slightest indication presented itself to show that Henrietta's billet had produced any effect. Gradually her spirits sank altogether; and she bade farewell to hope. Yes: but still she did not resign herself to the idea of succumbing to the wishes of Lord Everton: there was still one alternative—the last resource of despair—namely, death!

The evening came—the sun went down—the haze of dusk stole over the landscape—and the obscurity deepened into gloom. Susan made her appearance with the candles—drew the curtains—and began to lay a cloth in the dining-room for supper. Henrietta observed that she need not give herself the trouble to do this,—adding, "You know that I never take anything in the evening."

This she said in order to ascertain whether it was really Lord Everton's intention to force himself upon her; and when Susan answered calmly, "His lordship is going to sup with you, Miss,"—the young damsel felt as if the crisis of her fate were indeed approaching.

An idea struck her. She could do as she did once before—lock herself in another apartment. But Susan, evidently anticipating her design, hastened to the door of the drawing-room—took out the key—and secured it about her person. Henrietta saw that her enemies were determined; and she felt herself weighed down by a wretchedness so utter—a despair so profound—that the instant Susan left the room, she seized a knife from the supper-table with the intent of plunging it into her heart. But the images of her mother and little Charles suddenly appeared to rise up before her; and flinging the knife back upon the table, she murmured, "No—not now—not now. That must be the last resource of all!"

Presently Susan returned, followed by the footman, and both of them bearing numerous dishes containing the materials for a succulent repast. They likewise covered the side-board with fruit and wines; and when all this was done, Lord Everton, extravagantly dressed in the evening costume of an old *beau*, made his appearance. At a sign which he gave, the servants withdrew; and Henrietta found herself again alone with her persecutor.

"I hope," he said, "that you will spare me the necessity of arguments, threats, or entreaties. You must feel that you are completely at my mercy—you would do well to make a merit of your position—and if you agree to render me happy, there are no bounties which my hand can bestow which shall not be showered upon you."

But Henrietta gave no reply: she remained sitting in one corner of the room, with her looks bent down; for the sight of that old nobleman—as old in iniquity as he was in years—was indescribably loathsome to her.

"Is it possible, Henrietta," he continued, "that you can be so foolish? I cannot attribute it to mere virtue on your part: for I am terribly sceptical of the existence of such virtue at all in any female—especially where there is so much to gain by the sacrifice of the flimsy shadow. I therefore suppose that you are indignant at having been carried off—disappointed at not having been able to escape the other night—spirit-broken by the monotonous existence you have led? Well, I must endeavour to cheer you. See here, my dear girl—look at these bright things,—which, if your eyes can reflect their lustre, will make them doubtly bright also. And here," he continued, "is a proof of my liberality. See what happiness you may now ensure to your mother and your little brother, of whom you spoke to me the other day."

While thus addressing her, Lord Everton displayed first of all a casket containing a set of diamonds, a superb gold watch with an exquisitely worked chain, several rings, and other jewels,—the whole not having cost less than many hundreds of pounds: and in the second place he produced a small pocket-book which he opened, showing that its contents were a large roll of bank-notes.

Henrietta threw one languid glance towards the objects of temptation which he thus displayed; but it was an involuntary glance—one dictated by a transient and feeble curiosity, and followed by no result in his favour. On the contrary, her looks were instantaneously cast downward again; and she sat silent and motionless, the prey to a deep and absorbing sorrow.

"This is childish to a degree!" said Lord Everton petulantly. "Do you think that after all the trouble I have taken I mean to let you slip through my fingers? If so, you are very much in error. I have spoken fairly to you—I have just now proved that I can be bounteous and liberal: will you force me to use threats? Because, remember that threats will be followed by their execution, and will not be uttered in vain. Now listen—since to threats it is evident that you mean to impel me. Here is a little phial,"—and he produced one from his waistcoat-pocket,—"containing a powerful narcotic, but of a perfectly harmless character in other respects. It is now ten o'clock. I mean to remain patiently and quietly until eleven, partaking of my supper and enjoying my wine, whether you choose to join me or not. But if at eleven o'clock you have not thought better of your obstinacy and perverseness, I shall pour a few drops of this fluid into a glass, and fill it up with wine. Then, in spite of your resistance—in spite of your cries—in spite of your entreaties—my servants will pour the contents of that glass down your throat. Now, Henrietta Leyden, you understand me. You know what the effect will be! Insensibility! And then——But I need say no more. One hour have you for reflection."

Still the young maiden answered not: she appeared to have sunk into a stupor or apathy more profound than even despair

Lord Everton seated himself at table, and partook of the delicacies served up. He then rang the bell; and the servants who answered the summons removed the dishes and placed the fruit and wine on the board.

"The next time I ring," he said, addressing himself to Susan and the footman, "both of you will answer the summons; and let Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin accompany you:"—then as the door closed behind them, he turned to Henrietta, saying, "You perceive that I am in earnest."

Still she gave no reply. But stupified or apathetic as she might seem, she was not really so. Her thoughts were now terribly vivid within her. She had heard Lord Everton's diabolical threat in respect to the narcotic—she had heard likewise the order he had just given the domestics—and she did

not require to be told that he was quite capable of putting his menace into execution. On the contrary, she knew full well that he would do so; and now therefore it appeared as if there were no alternative for the poor young damsel but to make up her mind to die. She saw that there were knives upon the board and she resolved that one of them should presently drink her heart's blood. Still she lingered and lingered, painfully feeling how the time was passing away, and yet not daring to execute her fatal purpose. Oh! in the depth of her soul how sad, how sad was the farewell which she took of her parent and her little brother,—saying to herself, "I shall never see you again, but may heaven prove kinder towards ye both than it is has been to me! Unless indeed in its mercy it has already taken you, my poor mother, unto itself!"

The tears trickled down her cheeks—she clasped her hands convulsively—and her sobs reached the ears of the pitiless old nobleman, who was seated at the table luxuriating in delicious fruits and choice wines.

"Perhaps you have come to a resolve?" he said, bending his eyes upon her.

"Yes, yes—a resolve—my mind is made up!" she exclaimed, rising from her seat and advancing towards the table.

Everton's first thought was that she was about to signify her submission: but there was something in her looks which startled and troubled him—even for an instant filling him with dismay; for her gaze was so wild—her face so ghastly white—her excitement so terrible.

"Henrietta," he said, rising also from his chair, 'what am I to understand? what mean you?"

"My lord, once for all," she asked, "is your purpose settled?"

"Yes: have I not said it? But your's——"

"Is settled also," she rejoined quickly: "and that is—to die!"

Then with incredible promptitude she caught up a fruit-knife from the table, and was in the very act of dealing a blow at her heart, when Lord Everton, with an alacrity and also a strength of which his enfeebled frame seemed incapable, seized her arm and wrenched the weapon from her hand—but not without receiving a ghastly wound across his fingers in so doing.

"Wretched girl," he cried, "what would you do? But this shall not save you!"—and catching her round the waist, he impelled her towards the bell, which he rang violently.

Half-fainting—utterly overcome—and with a dizziness in her brain, Henrietta sank upon the floor; and in a few moments those individuals whom Lord Everton had ordered to be in attendance, hastened into the room.

CHAPTER XLIII.

LADY BESS'S ENTERPRISE.

It was close upon nine o'clock on the same evening of which we are writing, that Lady Bess, habited in her male apparel, dismounted from her gallant chesnut steed at the door of Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town. The potboy ran out to hold the horse; and the amazonian lady entered the boozing-ken. At the bar she inquired if Chiffin the Cannibal were in the house: but Solomon, without giving her a verbal reply to the question, made a significant sign, and beckoned Lady Bess to follow him. Several persons were either drinking or having their jugs filled at the bar; and she therefore supposed that Solomon did not choose to speak in their presence. She accordingly accompanied the obsequious, fawning old man, up into that little room which was used for private purposes, and has before been mentioned.

"I suppose you know, my lady," observed Solomon, with a mysterious look the instant they were alone together, "that Chiffin is on the shy. The truth is, he's wanted on account of the business in Park Lane yonder——"

"What business?" inquired Lady Bess. "I have heard nothing about it. I have been down at Dover for some days past and only returned to town yesterday. What has happened?"

"Why your ladyship must be informed," responded Patch, "that Chiffin and Tony Wilkins did a bit of a crack at Saxondale House——"

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed the amazon, with a smile which displayed her magnificent set of teeth: for the name recalled to her mind her freak with young Lord Saxondale on the road to Edmonton. "This is the first I have heard of it. But I *must* see Chiffin to-night—as well as Tony Wilkins and one or two others. It is imperative, Sol."

"Good, my lady—very good. As for Tony Wilkins and two or three others," continued Patch, "your ladyship can either see them as you like—or I will within a few minutes send them any orders your ladyship may have to give: for though they ain't here at the moment, they're not very far off—not very far, my excellent lady."

"Well then," said Lady Bess, "let Tony and two others set off and meet me in the lane behind Hornsey church between ten and eleven o'clock. Now I trust this to you, Sol—and you must not fail. But what about Chiffin? He is so absolutely necessary to me in the enterprise I have in hand, that I must see him. Where is he, I ask? Come—speak out."

"He's uncommon well concealed, my lady," responded Patch, with an obsequious but knowing grin. "The fact is, my lady, the detectives have been down here to look for him. It isn't often they trouble Agar Town with their presence; but they've done it on this occasion. You see, my lady, when a rich person is robbed, these fellers take more pains and run greater risks than in or'nary cases. But I expect, from a hint that Madge Somers let drop, that the affair is very likely to be made all comfortable, and Chiffin will be able to show again soon."

"Never mind what is hoped or expected," said Lady Bess, stamping her foot impatiently. "Tell me where I can see him."

"I will take your ladyship to him," answered Solomon. "May I respectfully and humbly request that your ladyship will have the kindness to go and wait at the foot of the nearest bridge for me? I will jine you there in five minutes. The boy shall just put your horse into the stable while we are absent. It's not very far from here—and as it's now dark there's not so much risk."

"But do not fail to send word to Tony Wilkins and the others," said Lady Bess. "And observe, Solomon, let each of the three have a brace of pistols. You understand me?"

Thus speaking, Lady Bess put a few gold pieces into the old landlord's hand; and with a most obsequious bow and fawning grimace, he said, "Your ladyship has a knack of making anybody understand—or at all events, of doing your bidding. The message shall be sent; and I'll be with your ladyship on the bridge in a few minutes."

The amazonian heroine thereupon descended the stairs; and issuing from the house, bade the potboy put up her horse till she returned, but ordered him not to unsaddle the animal, as she had no time to waste. She then repaired to the bridge, and walked to and fro for about ten minutes, at the expiration of which time Solomon Patch emerged from the deepening gloom of the evening. He requested her to follow him; and crossing the bridge they skirted the canal for a distance of about a couple of hundred yards,—at which point they reached a flight of steps leading down to the towing-path. These they descended; and proceeding along the path for a little way, they reached a coal-barge moored against it.

"Holloa!" said old Solomon, in a peculiar tone: and then he gave a short cough.

A man, whom even through the gloom Lady Bess could perceive to be all begrimed with coal-dust, emerged from the hatchway of the cabin-part of the barge; and on recognising the old landlord, he said, "Well, what's brought you here?" At the same time he eyed Lady Bess askance through the obscurity of the evening.

"All right, Tugs," responded Solomon, stepping on board the barge.

Lady Bess followed, though she did not seem altogether to admire the dirty quarters to which she was thus being led; for, as the reader is well aware, she dressed in the most exquisite style and with what might be termed a little dandyism, as applied to her male costume. The grimy individual whose name appeared to be Tugs, descended the hatchway, followed by Solomon and Lady Bess; and our heroine now found herself in the close fetid atmosphere of a little cabin, where by the dim light of a candle a woman was seated suckling a baby. This was none other than Mrs. Tugs; and it was an infant specimen of the Tugs' family which she was nourishing at the maternal bosom.

Lady Bess expected to find the Cannibal here; but she was disappointed, and therefore began to wonder wherefore she had been conducted to such a place at all. But she was not kept long in suspense: for the bargeman proceeded to open a cupboard in the bulk-head, or wooden partition that enclosed the cabin transversely; and then he lifted the whole of this cupboard out bodily. The entire array of shelves being thus removed, left an aperture about two feet wide and four feet high. A light glimmered within; and the odour of tobacco-smoke saluted the nostrils.

"There he is," observed Solomon Patch to Lady Bess.

Our heroine accordingly entered the opening; and in a little nook about six feet square, she beheld Chiffin the Cannibal, sitting on an inverted tub and puffing his pipe with a grim and sullen look.

"Well, what is it now?" he asked in a savage growling tone. "I suppose you've come, Lady Bess, to blow me up for running away and leaving you that night in the lurch—when we stopped the carriage, I mean. But, by Satan! I thought you was dead—or else I would have stuck by you to the last."

"And how did you know that I recovered?" asked Lady Bess.

"Cos why I saw Israel Patch from Gravesend up at Solomon's t'other day, and he told me as how you had rode down to Dover and thrown the rascals overboard. It was a deuced clever thing—and if I was in the humour I wouldn't mind saying summut more handsome still about it."

"Never mind compliments, Chiffin," rejoined Lady Bess, with a smile: "I know that they are things not much in your way. But how long do you mean to remain cooped up in this den? where ——excuse me laughing ——you look just for all the world like a bear in his cage at the Zoological Gardens."

"Ah! it's all deuced fine to make a jest of it," growled Chiffin, more savagely still: "but blow me if I like it. The detectives never were so sharp on a fellow before. Howsumever, if what old Madge says is true and she really does possess any influence in the affair, I expect it will be all right in a day or two."

"And if you saw your way clear to make a few guineas to-night, wouldn't you risk the danger and leave this crib, which is enough to suffocate you?"

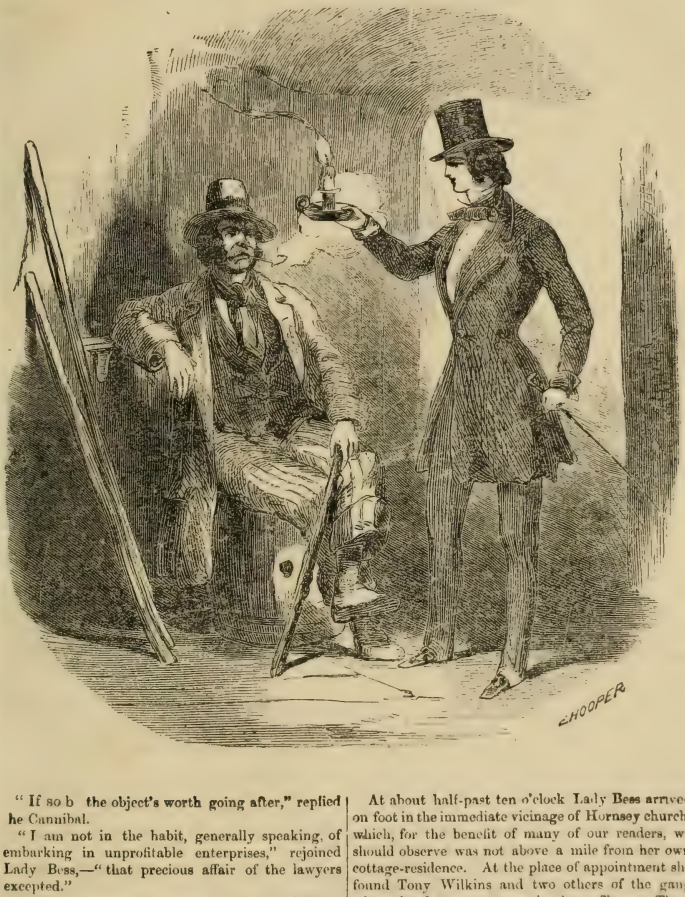
"'Pon my soul," answered Chiffin, taking the pipe from his mouth and puffing out an immense cloud of smoke, "I should be glad of almost any excuse to get out of such a cursed hole as this. But if one does risk one's safety it must be for some good reason or another; or else it's mere foolhardiness."

"Then I propose to furnish you with such an excuse," rejoined Lady Bess. "Come, pluck up your courage, Chiffin—and you shall make a good thing of it to-night."

"Oh! as for the courage, that's not wanting," returned the Cannibal, in a somewhat more cheerful tone, and with an endeavour to put on a little more amiable look. "Besides, somehow or another I've took a fancy to do things with you, Lady Bess—for you seem to have a deuced good run of luck. I used to be the boy for getting safe off: but this time things went wrong—and so I was obliged to come and play at hide-and-seek here with my friend Tugs the Blue-ruin Carrier."

Lady Bess now understood what the avocation of the bargeman was: for under the cloak of keeping an aquatic conveyance for coals, Mr. Tugs was in the habit of receiving on board his vessel the product of the numerous illicit stills worked in Agar Town. Hence his nick-name of the Blue-ruin Carrier—"blue-ruin" being the patter synonym for "gin."

"Come, Chiffin," said Lady Bess, "and prepare for action. You have a good walk before you. But it is now quite dark; and by following the pathway of the canal a little while, you may emerge safe at some convenient spot, whence you cross over to Hornsey church, where you must meet me at a quarter to eleven at the latest. Is it an understanding?"



"If so b the object's worth going after," replied he Cannibal.

"I am not in the habit, generally speaking, of embarking in unprofitable enterprises," rejoined Lady Bess,—"that precious affair of the lawyers excepted."

"Well, it *is* an understanding then," said Chiffin; "and I will be at the place punctual. I've got my bracers in my pocket; and with my club in my fist, it won't be an easy thing for two or three, or even four detectives to take me."

Lady Bess now quitted the barge, accompanied by old Solomon Patch; and they retraced their way to the boozing-ken where the heroine had left her horse. The gallant animal was at once brought forth from the stable—the amazonian lady vaulted upon its back—and having ascertained from Solomon that he had duly sent her instructions to Tony Wilkins and two others of the gang, she made the best of her way from Agar Town.

At about half-past ten o'clock Lady Bess arrived on foot in the immediate vicinage of Hornsey church, which, for the benefit of many of our readers, we should observe was not above a mile from her own cottage-residence. At the place of appointment she found Tony Wilkins and two others of the gang whose head-quarters were in Agar Town. These two auxiliaries were respectively known as Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill—the latter deriving the prefixed nickname from the circumstance of possessing very long legs which were excessively thin and resembling in shape those of the particular insect alluded to. A few minutes after Lady Bess made her appearance, the little party was joined by Chiffin the Cannibal, who seemed in a somewhat better humour than was his wont; for the fresh air and the prospect of "business" cheered his spirits after having been cooped up in the close and fetid atmosphere of the barge-cabin.

Lady Bess now hastily but distinctly described

the exact position of the house which was to be the scene of operations; and the little party all separating, each individual bent his way singly in the direction named. In a few minutes they were reunited in front of a house which stood a little back from the lane in which it was situated, and was embowered in the shade of large and wide-spreading trees. The gate was locked: but over this insignificant barrier the invaders promptly clambered. Scarcely had they thus set foot in the grounds, when a large dog sprang towards them: but Chiffin at once knocked him down with one blow of his club, and with a second despatched him. Lady Bess and her followers then advanced up to the front door, at which the heroine knocked imperiously; while the four men stood a little aside, so as not to be immediately observed by the person answering the summons.

In about a minute the door was opened by a female-servant; and Lady Bess, glancing rapidly around the hall, beheld no other person nigh.

"Now, don't be frightened, my good woman," she said, crossing the threshold: "for no harm will happen if you remain quiet: but if you cry out you must take the consequences."

While thus speaking, Lady Bess produced a pistol, merely to show that she was armed, but did not point it in a threatening way at the woman. The female was nevertheless profoundly frightened; and being overpowered by her terror as much as coerced by the intimation given her, she held her peace. The four ruffians now made their appearance: and the whole party passing into the hall, closed the front door behind them.

"Now, my good woman," said Lady Bess, "you will remain here with one of my men, while I examine the premises with the others. Tony Wilkins, to your charge I entrust her."

The terrified woman sank down upon one of the hall-chairs, still speechless with terror: and Tony Wilkins, armed with a brace of pistols, posted himself by her side. Chiffin, Mat the Cadger, and Spider Bill also produced their pistols; and led by Lady Bess, they at once entered the rooms opening from the hall. Therein they discovered no one: they accordingly descended to the kitchen-premises, where they found the gardener and the cook quietly eating their supper and perfectly unconscious of what had taken place in the hall. They were however terribly frightened at the sudden incursion of this armed band; but their fears somewhat subsided on receiving from Lady Bess the assurance that they should not be ill treated if they kept quiet. They naturally gazed with surprise upon this amazonian leader of the ruffian-band: for at a second glance they had not failed to discern her sex. They were marched up into the hall, where they were consigned, along with the other female-servant, to the custody of Tony Wilkins.

Lady Bess and her three followers next ascended the staircase—examined all the rooms on the first floor—but found no one there. They proceeded to mount the second flight; and on reaching the landing they heard voices speaking, and sounds as if a struggle were going on, within a room the door of which stood ajar.

Into this room they at once burst, Lady Bess leading the way: and there the following scene met their view. A young girl upon her knees, with dishevelled hair and anguish-stricken countenance, was imploring mercy at the hands of five persons who surrounded her. This young girl was, as the reader has no doubt already suspected, Henrietta Leyden; and the others, whose forbearance she was imploring, were Lord Everton, Mark Bellamy, the footman, Mrs. Martin, and Susan. Mrs. Martin held in her hand a wine-glass the contents of which she was ordering Henrietta to drink; while Bellamy and Susan were at the moment laying violent hands upon her in order to compel her to swallow the draught.

But at the sudden invasion of Lady Bess and her party, the whole aspect of the scene changed in an instant. Mrs. Martin dropped the wine-glass in alarm—Susan shrieked—Henrietta sprang to her feet—Lord Everton looked astounded—the footman knew not how to act—and Bellamy was the only one who had courage or presence of mind enough to accost the intruders at once and demand their business.

"You see that any attempt at resistance is useless," replied Lady Bess, playing with a pistol in such a manner as to indicate that she knew how to use it: while Chiffin on her right hand showed by his murderous-looking countenance that he was not a man to be trifled with.

As for Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill, they seemed very suitable companions indeed for such a person as the Cannibal; and when it is remembered that they were all well armed, the reader cannot be surprised if nothing in the shape of resistance was ever attempted.

"But what do you want? what is your object?" demanded Bellamy.

"In the first place, to rescue this young woman," responded Lady Bess.

"Oh, I thought that you were the same!" cried Henrietta, in the enthusiasm of joy; and she at once bounded forward towards the heroine—for she had no room in her soul at the instant for dismay or misgiving at the sinister-looking aspect of her companions.

"Yes—you have nothing to fear, poor girl!" at once responded Lady Bess. "It is in consequence of your note that I am here to deliver you. Stand back for a moment, while I transact a little business with these people."

Henrietta, full of mingled joy and amazement,—joy at this unlooked-for deliverance, and amazement at perceiving her deliverer to be a woman in male apparel,—glided hastily behind the heroine and her band.

"Now secure these men," said Lady Bess to her followers; "and if they dare offer resistance you will know how to act."

The order was speedily obeyed,—even Chiffin acting as a mere subaltern on the occasion, and by his conduct acknowledging the ascendancy of Lady Bess. Lord Everton, the footman, and Bellamy, were compelled to submit to the process of binding by means of the cords which the capacious pockets of the intruders furnished; while Susan, retreating into a corner of the room, gave vent to her terror in piteous lamentations—and Mrs. Martin stood silently watching the proceedings, but with a countenance that bespoke profound dismay.

"You will not harm them?" said Henrietta, addressing herself in a tone of entreaty to Lady Bess.

"Cruelly as I have been used, I seek not for revenge."

"My dear girl," responded the amazonian lady curtly, "you must leave us to manage after our own fashion. It is sufficient for you that these people are no longer capable of injuring you, and that you shall be presently free to go where you will. Are there any other females in this house under circumstances similar to your own?"

"I cannot say," responded Henrietta: "but I am inclined to think not. There is however one individual in whom I am interested—a prisoner under mysterious circumstances——"

"Enough! he shall be delivered also," cried Lady Bess.

"No—you dare not perpetrate such a foul wrong," exclaimed Lord Everton, in mingled rage and terror, as he literally writhed in the chair to which he had been bound,—Bellamy and the footman having undergone a similar process.

"Who is this old reprobate?" asked Lady Bess, turning towards Henrietta. "Is he the person named Bellamy?"

"Answer no questions, my good girl," cried Lord Everton, in a voice of the most abject entreaty: "I implore that you will not!"

"Yes—but she will," was the cool response given by Lady Bess: "for she will obey the directions of her deliverers."

Henrietta had certainly no reason for showing any favour towards the old nobleman, nor indeed any one of the individuals who had been concerned in persecuting her; and she accordingly named them all one after the other.

"Oh! then the suspicions excited by your note and the result of the little inquiries which I myself have caused to be privately made during the day, are fully confirmed. This then," continued Lady Bess, "is nothing more than one of those mansions of convenience which under some plausible disguise serve the infamous purpose of an aristocratic voluptuary. Ah! what pretty things have we here?"—and she advanced towards the sofa where the jewel-casket which Lord Everton had intended as a temptation to Henrietta, was lying open. "And here is a pocket-book too, with bank-notes in it. Come, you shall take charge of these little matters," she added, turning towards Chiffin, whose eyes glistened at the sight of the diamonds.

Henrietta now looked aghast, and a faint shriek escaped her lips: for all in an instant was she made aware that her deliverers, instead of being impelled by the most disinterested purpose in respect to herself alone, entertained predatory views as well.

"A thousand pounds—that's what this here book contains," said Chiffin, who had hastily glanced over the roll of bank-notes.

"My dear girl," said Lady Bess, turning towards Henrietta, "you really must not attempt to interfere with our proceedings. We mean to reward ourselves for the trouble taken on your account."

"And considering all things," added Chiffin, glancing towards the prisoners, "they won't dare to make a piece of work about it. So there's no need to cut any throats or blow any brains out. But we may as well get as much as we can out of 'em."

Thus speaking, he made a sign to Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill; whereupon they all three proceeded to rifle the persons of Lord Everton and Mr. Bellamy, despoiling them of their watches, their rings, and their purses: but they took no notice of the footman, nor of Mrs. Martin and Susan. Henrietta surveyed these proceedings with the most painful sensations: but she dared not give utterance to a word of remonstrance.

"Now, about this other individual whom you wish to have rescued?" said Lady Bess, once more turning to Henrietta.

"You will have to search for him. I know not in which part of the house he is confined."

"We will soon discover that," responded the heroine. "But you would do well to put on such clothing as you may intend to go forth with, as we shall soon take our departure."

Henrietta hurried to the door of the drawing-room, which she had to pass through to reach the bed-chamber: but that door was locked—for Susan, be it remembered, had taken away the key. This circumstance Henrietta at once named; and Susan produced the key from her pocket. The young damsel then took up one of the lights and proceeded to the bed-chamber.

The instant she had quitted the room, Lord Everton said to Lady Bess, "Whoever you are, I beg that you will give me your attention for a few moments—in private, I mean—or else aside——"

"Speak out," cried the heroine: "there need be no secrets from my companions."

"In the first place be so good as to tell me," said Lord Everton, "under what circumstances you came hither."

"They were ingenious enough," was the reply, delivered with a smile. "A whalebone arrow, shot from one of the back windows of the house, conveyed to me a note as I was riding on the river's bank; and the note gave me the intimation that there was a forlorn damsel to be rescued within the walls of this terrible fortress, whereof *you*, Lord Everton, appear to be the ogre: for assuredly you are not a giant either in courage or size. And now, what more have you to say? for it is ridiculous enough that you should play the part of a questioner and I that of the questioned."

"Are you not satisfied with what you have done?" asked the nobleman, who was evidently a prey to the direst apprehensions. "You cannot think of giving his release to a wretched lunatic: for such indeed is the individual to whom this girl Henrietta refers——"

"A lunatic?" echoed Lady Bess. "From all I have heard and seen, I scarcely think that Lord Everton would in reality keep a private madhouse. No, my lord: I have fathomed the nature of this secluded mansion——"

"I can assure you," he promptly rejoined, "it is duly licensed as a lunatic asylum—it is not mine—I have nothing to do with it—my friend Mr. Bellamy keeps it."

"Then wherefore are you, my lord, so deeply interested in the safe custody of this alleged lunatic in whose behalf my aid has been evoked?" asked Lady Bess, with an incredulous smile.

At this instant Henrietta re-appeared, with her bonnet and shawl, ready for departure; and having caught the last words which had fallen from Lady Bess's lips, she at once comprehended that during

her temporary absence some endeavour had been made by Lord Everton to prevent the rescue of the mysterious unknown with the pale sad face and the loose dressing-gown.

"Oh! do not be persuaded against a good deed," she exclaimed, in earnest appeal to Lady Bess. "Whoever you are, and whatever you may be, I conjure you to accomplish this night's work thoroughly. The unfortunate being for whom I have appealed, is under some dread coercion here—a strange mystery surrounds him——"

"Ah! this becomes more and more interesting!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "But let us see the individual we are speaking of."

"One word in your ear!" cried Lord Everton, as if clutching nervously at some last resource. "Only one word, I beg—I entreat!"

Lady Bess accordingly approached the nobleman, and bent down her head to catch what he had to say: then turning away again after he had whispered a few hurried syllables in her ear, she exclaimed aloud, "Two thousand guineas—eh? not to interfere any further! The offer is a tempting one: but it strikes me that if it be worth so much for your lordship to pay to keep the alleged lunatic in custody, it must be worth double or treble the sum for us to set him free. We will do the latter."

"Mind what you are about," growled Chiffin in a low voice, as he drew Lady Bess aside for a moment. "Two thousand guineas isn't to be sneezed at."

"Leave me to manage," was Lady Bess's prompt but whispered answer. "From something I have heard strange suspicions are afloat in my mind: and I rather think that we may make this night's business worth many thousands of pounds to us."

"Well, you know best," said Chiffin, yielding to the ascendancy which this extraordinary woman appeared to assert and most assuredly to exercise over all those who acted in concert with her.

"Now, Miss Leyden," she exclaimed, "we will pursue our researches. You two," she added, speaking to Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill, "will remain here for a few minutes to mount guard over the prisoners and see that these women do not leave the room."

"One word more!" cried Lord Everton: "only one word—one last word—I beseech you!"

"Not a word—not a syllable," exclaimed Lady Bess: and as she passed out of the room, followed by Chiffin and Henrietta, the wretched old nobleman gave vent to a cry expressive of feelings wrought up to an excruciating agony—while Bellamy muttered deep but bitter imprecations, and Mrs. Martin shivered from head to foot with mingled rage and terror. Nor were the footman and Susan unconcerned: but probably they had less reason to be so deeply agitated as the rest.

Meanwhile Lady Bess, Chiffin, and Henrietta had emerged upon the landing outside; and taking a lamp which was burning on a table there, they ascended to the higher storey, where Miss Leyden deemed it most probable they should find the object of their search. They reached a passage which appeared to run the whole width of the building, with an array of doors on either side. First of all, in pursuance of Henrietta's suggestion, they endeavoured to enter a room which as nearly as she could calculate was immediately above the suite of apartments she had occupied in the house: for she fancied that from thence must have descended the lamentations and that thrilling cry which she had heard one night. The door was however locked: but a crowbar from Chiffin's pocket speedily forced it open. The room which they now entered, and which was tolerably well furnished, was found to be unoccupied; but it evidently had not been long without a tenant: for the bed had not been made since it was last slept in, while other indications justified the belief. Issuing from this room, they were about to examine the next, when a loud cry coming from overhead, thrillingly reached their ears. That cry—it was instantaneously recognised by Henrietta! Those piercing accents—the wild lamentation which characterised them—the penetrating anguish of the sound—all were the same!

A staircase at the end of the passage caught their eyes. They hastened to ascend it; but their way was suddenly impeded by a trap-door closing the top. It was secured by a staple and a padlock; but Chiffin's crowbar speedily forced these obstacles. The quick trampling of feet, as if some one were rushing towards the trap-door, met the ears of the searchers: and the moment the door itself was removed, Henrietta beheld, by the light of the lamp, the ghastly and unmistakable countenance of her unknown friend, gazing in mingled terror and suspense down the opening.

It was a long loft to which Lady Bess, the Cannibal, and Henrietta had thus found their way: and until the moment when the light of the lamp developed the features of the scene, the captive had been entombed in darkness. A truckle bedstead, a washing-stand, a table, a chair, and a few other necessaries, were all the furniture to be seen in that dreary, dismal place. And there was the unfortunate prisoner himself, enveloped in the long dressing-gown secured at the waist, and with that pale thin countenance which, once seen, could never be forgotten!

The unfortunate being recoiled in dismay from the ferocious looks of Chiffin the Cannibal, who was highest up the staircase: but gathering courage, he gazed down again, and seemed stricken with surprise at beholding a female in man's attire. Then he caught sight of Henrietta Leyden, whom he at once recognised; and a smile of satisfaction, amounting even to joy, spread itself over his countenance. Still, in all these rapidly varying changes of expression, there was blended a certain wild vacancy, which if not indicative of complete mental aberration, at all events denoted a partial disorder of the reason.

"Speak to him; he seems to recognise you," said Lady Bess to Henrietta.

"We come to deliver you, if you like to go away with us," the young maiden accordingly said, in the gentle accents of her sweetly musical voice.

"Yes, yes—I will go away with you," was the response, joyfully delivered; and without another word, the stranger descended the stairs in the rear of the three persons who had rescued him.

"But he never can leave the house in this guise," said Lady Bess aside to Henrietta. "We must obtain proper apparel for him. Let us see how it is to be managed."

"Perhaps the footman may have some plain clothes?" suggested Henrietta: "for neither Lord Everton's nor Mr. Bellamy's would fit him."

While this rapid exchange of whispered observations was going on, the party had threaded the passage, descended the staircase, and reached the landing whence opened the apartment where the prisoners had been left.

"Remain here," said Lady Bess: and she passed into the dining-room.

Lord Everton at once began pouring forth the most piteous entreaties that she would not take away with her the individual whom he suspected she had just rescued from captivity: but she paid no regard to his prayers: and ordering Mat the Cadger to loosen the footman from his bonds, she bade the domestic follow her. This command he promptly obeyed; and when outside the room, Lady Bess said to him, "Has this unfortunate creature got any other clothes of his own, besides the wretched things he has on?"

"Clothes? no, sir—ma'am," responded the footman, not knowing exactly whether to address Lady Bess as a male or a female: for although there could be no doubt as to her sex, yet he knew not in what style she herself might chooso to be spoken to.

"Then I suppose he has been here a long time?" she said inquiringly.

"Yes—a long, long time," answered the footman. "But I have got some clothes of my own," he added, "which are very much at his service—very much indeed."

"Hasten and fetch them," said the heroine: but as the footman was hurrying away, she made a sign for Chiffin to accompany him.

In a few minutes they returned, the footman bearing a large bundle of clothing: and the mysterious unknown was desired to pass into the nearest vacant room and put them on. This he did, and in about ten minutes came issuing forth, considerably improved in appearance, and wearing a look of delight at the change thus effected in his garb. There was however something childish in this look,—another indication that the mind of the unhappy man was indeed somewhat unsettled. Lady Bess perceived this and hesitated for a moment whether she ought really to take the strange being away. But recollecting the intense anxiety of Lord Everton to prevent her—the heavy bribe he had offered—and the information which she herself had gleaned during the day, she hesitated no longer.

"Now," she said to the footman, "you can return to your employers:"—and she made an imperious sign towards the door of the room where they had remained bound to their chairs. "You can also tell my two men to rejoin me."

"Beg pardon," said the footman hesitatingly; "but I see there's most likely to be a rumpus about *him*;"—and he glanced towards the pale unknown. "If so be such a thing as a witness is wanted——"

"Ah! the suggestion is not bad," ejaculated Lady Bess. "At the same time I cannot attend to the matter to-night. What is your name?"

"Theodore Barclay," responded the footman; "at your service, ma'am—sir—ma'am——"

"Very well, Theodore Barclay," said Lady Bess. "You can inquire to-morrow or next day at the post-office in Hornsey if there is a letter for you; and should you find one, you will do well to attend to any appointment it may indicate."

"Depend upon it I shall not fail. But mum's the word:"—and thus speaking, he retreated back into the dining-room in obedience to another sign hastily and imperatively made by Lady Bess.

Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill now came forth from that room where they had been keeping guard: and the little party descended to the hall, where the gardener and the two female servants had remained in the custody of Tony Wilkins. These servants were not a little surprised to behold the pale-faced stranger in company with the intruders and Henrietta: they did not however say a word—and the party emerged from the house.

Reader, can you possibly depict to yourself the feelings of lively joy—the emotions of exultant bliss—which arose in the heart of Henrietta Leyden as she once more breathed the fresh air of liberty? For the instant all other considerations were lost sight of: she remembered not the evidently too desperate character of those to whom she owed her deliverance—she thought not of the possibility of her prolonged absence having proved fatal to her mother—she recollected not that another individual had been rescued that night. Nor was it until they were at some little distance from Beech-Tree Lodge, that she was recalled from that paradise of abstraction to the full remembrance of all other things.

"Now, Miss Leyden," said Lady Bess, stopping short near that point where the diverging road joined the main one, "have you any settled plan to adopt—any home to go to? If not, I will give you an asylum——"

"Oh, yes—I have a home——or at least I hope so ——God grant that nothing may have happened to my poor mother in my absence!" she cried, thus giving audible expression to the anguished thought which suddenly recurred to her. "But I have not as yet expressed my gratitude to you for my deliverance. Oh! may I hope," she added in a low but fervid whisper, as she drew Lady Bess aside with the sudden force of a nervous agitation,—"may I hope that I have not altogether comprehended some portion of what has passed within those walls?"

"I know to what you allude," interrupted Lady Bess; "the appropriation of certain little things by the men who accompanied me? Think no more of that—or at all events talk of it no more. Rest contented with your deliverance. You see that I did better than place your note in the hands of the police-authorities, as its terms enjoined. Had I done so, they would not have interfered, Beech-Tree Lodge being really licensed as a mad-house. I was therefore compelled to strike a bold and prompt blow to deliver you. I have done it: and surely you are not disposed to quarrel with the means employed?"

"I am incapable of ingratitude," replied Henrietta energetically. "Tell me the name of her to whom I am so much indebted?"

"In my present apparel I am Captain Chandos," responded the heroine: "if I were in a female garb I should be Mrs. Chandos. Here," she continued, taking a card from a case, "is my address. Perhaps you will like to learn more of that strange being whom we have this night delivered? If so, you can call upon me: for I purpose to take him with me. And now tell me—are you happy in your own circumstances? would money be of any service to you?"

"No, no," replied Henrietta, giving perhaps a

little more vehemence to her response than was altogether consistent with the gratitude she owed Lady Bess: but still the girl's honest feelings were predominant at the time.

"I understand you," said the heroine, neither moved nor offended. "You are afraid that whatsoever gold my purse may contain, is not honestly acquired? Well, if you need no pecuniary assistance, so much the better. And now, one word more ere we part. It will be well that no noise should be made about the adventure of this night. I have a claim upon your gratitude; and the way in which you can testify it is by taking care that your friends do not seek redress at the hands of justice for whatsoever you may have suffered from Lord Everton. Because if once you endeavour to put the law in force, you cannot tell half the truth, but must explain it all; and if you loudly proclaim how you got into Beech-Tree Lodge, you will be compelled to proclaim as loudly how you got out of it. This might lead to unpleasant inquiries after myself; and these of course you would not willingly be the means of setting afoot."

"Depend upon it I will do nothing to compromise you," answered Henrietta. "And excuse me if I add—with the deepest, deepest sincerity—that may God grant you never do more to injure yourself than I shall do to injure you!"

"You are a good girl," rejoined Lady Bess: "but it is evident that our paths run in opposite ways in life. Nevertheless we shall meet again: for I know that you will come and see me."

Thus speaking, the amazonian lady wrung Henrietta's hand; and a separation then took place—Lady Bess, with the stranger and her companions, proceeding one way, and Miss Leyden in another.

Long, lonely, and weary was the walk—or rather run—which the young damsel had at that midnight hour (for so late it now was) until she reached Holloway; and thence she obtained a conveyance into London. It was two in the morning when she reached the court in the vicinage of Soho, where she had last seen her mother and Charley. Oh! with what a beating heart did she approach the door—with what deep and painful misgivings did she await the response to her summons! She looked up to see if there were a light in the attic-window: but there was none.

At the expiration of five minutes she heard steps approaching down the passage from within: the door opened—and the landlady appeared with a light. She started on beholding Henrietta: but hurried and breathless was the inquiry which the young girl made. Her mother was alive: this was the instantaneous source of an almost overpowering joy! But she was very, very ill: and this second intimation produced as quick a re-action of the feelings. She was still in the house—but in a better room, on the first floor. The benevolent gentleman—Mr. Gunthorpe by name—who had interested himself in the poor family, had wished to have her moved into the country, a little way out of London: but poor Mrs. Leyden had declared that she would remain in that house until her daughter returned; so that when she *did* return there might be no unnecessary delay ere they met—and if she never returned, then the unhappy mother would die there!

Such was the information which Henrietta gathered from the landlady's words; and even this she would not have paused to receive, had not her feelings been so overpowering for the first few minutes as to prevent her from speeding up to her mother's chamber. But at length recovering the use of her limbs, she was enabled to obey the dictates of her heart; and rushing up the stairs, she was in a few moments clasped in Mrs. Leyden's arms. Little Charley awoke; and that was indeed a happy meeting! For in the midst of kisses, and tears, and fervid embraces, Henrietta breathed a few words in her mother's ears—but sufficient to make that parent understand and give her the assurance that pure and stainless as her daughter was when she went away, so pure and stainless did she return.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE BARGE.

It was the night after the adventures at Beech-Tree Lodge, and between ten and eleven o'clock. A lantern was suspended to the ceiling of the cabin of the barge moored in the canal at Agar Town; and at the little round table three persons were seated. These were Chiffin the Cannibal, Mr. Tugs, and the latter's wife. The cupboard was removed from the recess which it usually occupied, the aperture being thus left ready for the Cannibal to pass into his lurking-hole should any visitor of a suspicious character make his appearance. Upon the table stood a bottle of gin, the product of one of the illicit stills worked in the neighbourhood; and three glasses showed that the persons in the cabin had been partaking of the alcoholic fluid. Tugs and the Cannibal were smoking their pipes; while Mrs. Tugs was suckling the child, which was about eight or nine months old. She was a young woman, and if clean would have appeared fresh-looking and not altogether ugly: but she had a somewhat grimy appearance, and was not over tidy in her dress.

"Well," said the Cannibal, removing the pipe from his mouth and vomiting forth a cloud of smoke, "I wonder whether Madge Somers will come here to-night? You say that she was here last night, just after I had left the barge to meet Lady Bess at Hornsey church?"

"Yes: Madge came last night," responded the woman, to whom the question was addressed. "Tugs had gone up into the Town to see some of the blue-ruin brewers"—meaning the workers of the illicit stills—"and so I was here all alone."

"And she wouldn't leave no message, then?" said Chiffin inquiringly.

"On'y that she would come back agin to-night, and that you was to keep close till she did. So I suppose she will be here soon."

"I hope so," observed Chiffin with one of his wonted growls; "for I am precious tired of being cooped up here. At the same time, mind you, I am very much obleeged to you, Mrs. Tugs, and your husband, for making me so comfortable: but for a man which likes his liberty, this here sort of confinement isn't altogether the thing."

"And yet you had a little change last night,"

observed Tugs. "It was a pity it didn't turn out better for you."

"For my part I was precious savage at the disappointment," remarked the Cannibal. "Taking all that trouble and running all that risk without getting a penny by it!"

"Well, it was perwokin', no doubt," said Tugs, as he filled the three glasses from the bottle. "But I say, who is that Lady Bess, as you call her? I never see her afore. What a smart-looking creetur' she is."

"And doesn't she look well in that there dress she wears!" exclaimed Mrs. Tugs. "What a elegant-fitting frock-coat! It gave her quite a man's look—except about the bust, which is rayther too full to let the disguise be complete. I should think she must look uncommon well in her own proper dress—I mean when togged as a woman."

"I never see her dressed in any other way but as she was last night," observed the Cannibal. "She is a queer creature, no doubt."

"Do you mean she is a rum un as a woman?" asked Tugs.

"No—not in that sense," replied Chiffin. "I never heard anything against her: quite t'other way—for it is said she hasn't even the feelings and passions of her sex—no lovers, and therefore no intrigues. Such is what they say of her: but I believe precious few really know anything about Lady Bess."

"She's quite the lady," said Mrs. Tugs. "And what a nice-spoken creatur' too! One would think she was a person of quality—quite!"

"I should say she's quite *the gentleman*," observed Tugs with a laugh. "Her manners is so good, and she has such a sort of off-hand way with her, it's quite pleasant to hear her talk and observe her hattitudes. She's a dandy after her own sort: but yet not one of them kind of dandies that you'd like to kick all along a street. What do you think, Chiffin? You know more about her than we do."

"I know deuced little about her," responded the Cannibal. "She's always in just the same mood you saw her last night—first-rate spirits, and with that sort of jovial frankness and open-heartedness, as one may say, that somehow makes you like her. And then, although engaged with her in business that puts you on a sort of equality, you can't help feeling the whole time that you are with a superior. That woman exercises what we may call an ascendancy over one; and however much you mayn't like to acknowledge it to yourself, still you can't help feeling it. Did you notice what a pair of eyes she has? don't they seem as if they could pierce you through and through?"

"I never saw such splendid eyes in all my life," said Mrs. Tugs. "And what teeth too! I should think the handsomest and proudest young lord in the land would be glad to get a kiss from such lips as them."

"And I think that if he was to attempt it," replied Chiffin, "he'd get Lady Bess's whip pretty comfortably over his shoulders. At least, if all I have heard tell about her is true, that she hasn't got the feelings of the sex——"

"How extr'ornary!" said Mrs. Tugs, apparently in a musing strain. "I know blessed well I've got all them ere feelings:"—and as she thus spoke, to all appearance in a very sentimental mood, she emptied her glass, except two or three drops which she let drain down the baby's throat.

"I see that the little creetur' likes blue-ruin as well as his ma," observed Chiffin with a laugh: but there was something horrible and ferocious even in the most good-humoured laugh which Mr. Chiffin could possibly assume.

"It's natur'," said Mrs. Tugs. "Natur' makes us all love lush from our wery birth. Lord bless yer! I've seen smaller babbies than this von suck down the blue-ruin just as if it was their mother's milk. But what more about this Lady Bess that I'm quite interested in? If so be she was raly a man, I should make Tugs jellus. Where does she bide?"

"Ah! that she keeps precious dark to herself," replied Chiffin. "But I know that she is mostly seen about Edmonton and Tottenham; and one or two of my pals have twigged her more than once riding about them neighbourhoods in a lady's dress—a habit as they call it,—and looking quite elegant and tip-top like. There must be summut very rum about that woman's history!"

"There must indeed, from all you have said," observed Mrs. Tugs. "And so she actually does business on the highway? What a bold dashing creetur' she must be! If I was a rich young gen'elman I shouldn't at all mind being robbed by such a highwayman as that. You don't know, then, what made her take to the road?"

"Not I," responded Chiffin. "All that I know about her I've told you."

"And so the adwenture of last night turned out a failure, did it?" said Tugs as he filled the glasses again.

"Oh! a precious failure," answered Chiffin: "nothing got by it! But I wonder whether this precious Madge is coming to-night. I am deucedly in want of the fresh air——"

"Why don't you take a little stroll along the towing-path?" said Tugs. "The night's dark enow, and you ain't likely to meet any unpleasant customers. If Madge comes we can keep her till you return."

"So I will," observed Chiffin: and having tossed off the contents of his glass, he ascended from the cabin, stepped ashore, and sauntered along the bank of the canal.

"Now, Polly," said the Blue-ruin Carrier when he and his wife were alone together in the cabin, "has no hidear struck you at all?"—and he looked very hard at her.

"You mean that Chiffin's got money about him?" replied the woman, returning the look.

"That's just what I do mean," said her husband, drawing closer towards her and speaking in a still lower and more significant tone. "I'm sure he has; and I don't believe for a minute that the affair of last night turned out so queer. Chiffin never would have took it so quiet—he's not the chap."

"That's what I thought," responded Mrs. Tugs. "And now, d'ye know why I took and questioned him so much about Lady Bess?"

"Woman's coorosity, I s'puse," was the response.

"Woman's fiddlestick!" cried Mrs. Tugs. "It was just to see whether Chiffin would speak in a way to show he had been disappointed with Lady Bess last night. If he had, it would have appeared

in his manner: he couldn't have concealed it—it would have been uppermost in his mind, and so have showed itself in his observations. But it didn't: and so I'm as sure that he got loads of swag last night as that I'm suckling this here blessed babby."

"What a clever woman you be, Polly," was the compliment now paid her by her husband. "Who'd have thought you was pumping the Cannibal all the time you seemed to be chatting so cosy and familiar?"

"Well, but it was so," replied Mrs. Tugs; "and if that feller hasn't got his pockets lined with blunt, I'll eat this babby up at a mouthful—I will."

"A precious mean chap he is, then!" exclaimed Tugs now looking particularly ferocious through the black grime on his face.

"Mean!" echoed his wife: "he's a measly skinflint—coming here, bolting our grub, and swallowing our lush, and just giving us a shilling or two tow'rds housekeeping, when he ought to come down handsome and make us a jolly good present. I'm sick of such conduct, I be."

"Well, Polly, if what's passing in my mind is passing in your'n too, we'll have the whole of his blunt afore many hours is over:"—and the man looked hard at his wife to read her answer in her countenance.

"When a chap behaves his-self as Chiffin is doing now," she replied, "I would as soon draw a knife across his throat and sink him in the canal as I'd eat my dinner. So if you're the man, Tugs, to do the job, I'm the woman as will help yer."

"Then I'm blowed if it isn't as good as done," responded the Blue-ruin Carrier: "perwided we settles how it *is* to be done—that's all."

"Done? Why, in the way I've said," was the quick answer given by his wife. "Hush! some one calls."

Tugs hastily jumped up from his seat, and thrust his head out of the hatchway of the cabin. A woman was standing in the towing-path; and through the gloom Tugs at once recognised Madge Somers.

"All right!" he said. "Come on board."

Madge accordingly stepped on the barge, and descended into the cabin. Tugs offered her some gin: but she refused to take it—immediately adding, "Where is he?"

"What news have you got for him?" asked Tugs, evading the woman's question.

"Good news," she replied. "But where is he, I ask?"

"Well, that's a pity," said Tugs: "for he's gone out for the night again."

"How provoking!" exclaimed Madge Somers. "But if he didn't mind running these risks, what was the use of my troubling myself to get the thing put right and square for him? I cannot wait till he returns—I cannot come back again when he is likely to be here; and therefore I must leave a message with you. You can tell him that the business is hushed up, and that her ladyship has intimated to the police that all her things have been restored to her on condition that she would not move any further in the matter, and that as she has got them back her object is answered. Of course a single word from her ladyship was sufficient to stop the proceedings; and so Chiffin has nothing more to fear in that quarter."

"This will be good news for him," said Tugs. "He told me he shouldn't be back till just upon daylight, and I'm going to sit up for him."

"Then you can deliver my message," said Madge: and appearing to be somewhat in a hurry, she took her departure.

"Well, didn't I manage capital to perwent the woman staying?" said Tugs. "If she had, Chiffin would have flitted away on hearing the news, and we should have been baulked in our job—eh, Polly?"

"Yes—you managed capital," responded the woman. "Now mind you manage as well presently when the thing is to be done—that's all."

The husband and wife then drew closer together until their faces almost met; and in subdued whispers did they discourse upon the murderous project they had devised.

In the mean time Madge Somers, when quitting the barge, had pursued her way along the towing-path; and at a short distance she encountered Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Ah!" she exclaimed: "then you have altered your mind?"

"Altered my mind?" he repeated, in a growling tone. "What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Why, in coming back so soon—that is how you have altered your mind: for I suppose you are now on your way to the barge?"

"To be sure. I only just came out to get a mouthful of fresh air. I can't endure being cooped up in that coffin-like place."

"Then what made you tell those people that you did not intend to return till close upon daylight?"

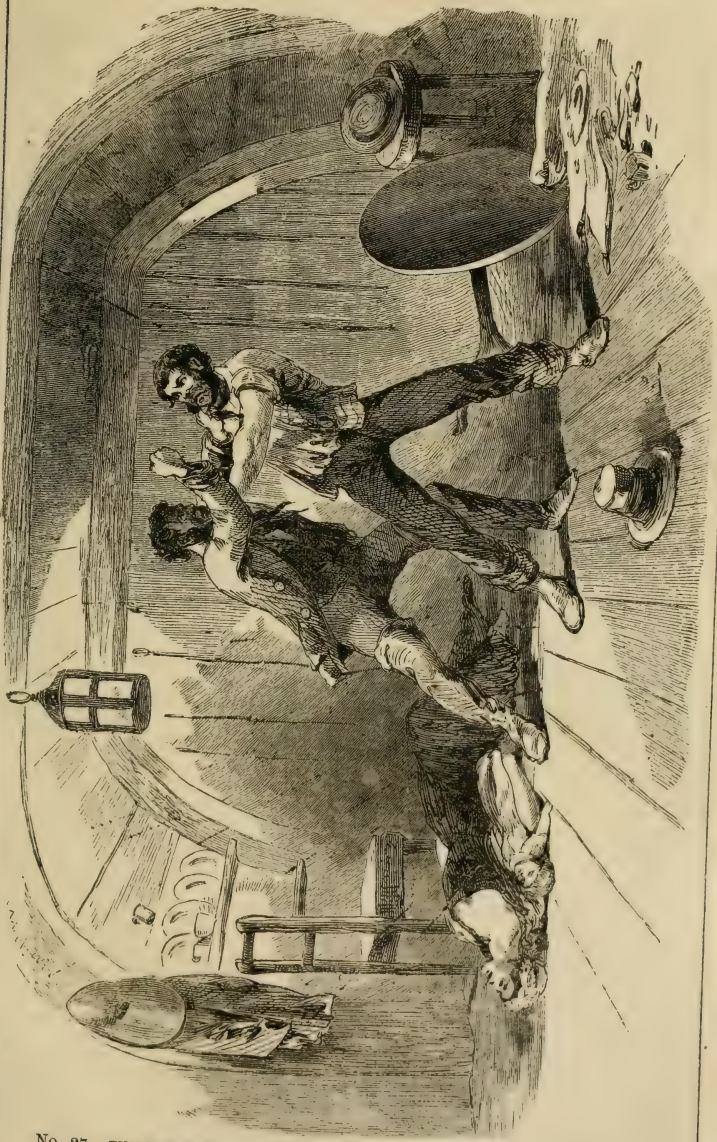
"You don't mean to say they told you that?" exclaimed Chiffin.

"But I do though: and that's the reason I did not stop. I however left a message with them for you——"

"And what's it about? Have you made it all right?"

"Yes—after a great deal of trouble," responded Madge. "Her ladyship has intimated to the detectives who had the thing in hand, that she does not wish the proceedings to go any farther. The excuse she made was that somebody had been to her, brought all the things back that had been stolen from the house, and besought her mercy and forbearance; and that therefore, as her chief object was gained in recovering her valuables, she was disposed to grant the request. In short, she gave the detectives to understand that she did not choose to have the trouble and discomfort of a prosecution, especially as she was very soon going out of town. The detectives went and called upon her ladyship in consequence of this note which she sent them: but as she gave them each a pretty handsome sum for the trouble they had already taken, they of course promised to follow her directions. So as far as that affair goes, you are safe enough. I saw Tony Wilkins just now; and he told me that you had a fine affair of it last night—heaps of money, besides a lot of diamonds and other valuables: so what with the swag you got from Lady Saxondale, the money I gave you a little time back, and the produce of last night, you must be quite rich."

"Well, do you mean to turn borrower, Madge?" asked Chiffin, evidently not relishing the woman's



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discourse, and fancying that it was a prelude to demanding some pecuniary favour at his hands.

"Don't be afraid, Chiffin," she replied, having read what was passing in his mind. "You know that I am not one who asks favours of that sort: or if you don't know it, you ought to do so—for you and I have been acquainted long enough. What I was going to say is, why don't you settle down into some quiet kind of life—take a public or a shop, for instance—or even set up a lodging-house?"

"No, no—a public is the thing for me," answered Chiffin; "a good boozing-ken in some precious queer neighbourhood. I should be in my glory there; and to tell you the truth, Madge, I have been thinking of summut of that kind. Now that this cursed affair of the detectives is over, I shall look about me. But I say, wasn't it rather queer of these Tugs people to tell you such a precious lie? I can't think what could be the meaning of it."

"Evidently to prevent me from waiting to see you," replied Madge. "You had therefore better take care of them: there's some treachery lurking in that quarter."

"Well now," observed Chiffin in a musing tone, "I thought them Tugs was the honestest people towards their pals that ever was. Of course I didn't tell them I had anything in the shape of blunt about me, for fear they should get on the borrowing plan; and one couldn't very well refuse what they asked after all their kindness. But there's something that isn't right in that quarter. I don't like this affair of their stalling you off from seeing me: it looks precious suspicious."

"Well," returned Madge, "you have no need to go back to the barge again unless you like."

"Yes—but I have though," replied Chiffin: "for to tell you the truth——But no matter! I must get back as quick as ever I can. Good night, Madge—and thank you for what you have done."

The woman and the Cannibal then separated, and the latter sped along in the direction of the barge. He had indeed good reason for returning thither; inasmuch as he had left his great loose shaggy over-coat in the little nook or recess that formed his place of concealment; and in that self-same coat he had got a quantity of bank-notes sewn inside the lining. But as he went back to the barge, he felt in his breeches' pockets to see that his pistols were safe, muttering to himself the while, "If these Tugs mean treachery, I'm blowed if I don't make them both sleep at the bottom of the canal before daylight—and their babby along with 'em for that matter."

Resuming however his wonted look, which with all his endeavour to give it a good-humoured aspect, was still of the most hang-dog and sinister character, he reached the boat and gave a peculiar whistle. The head of Tugs was soon perceived thrust above the hatchway—the assurance that all was right came from that individual's lips—and Chiffin descended into the cabin. He cast a quick but keenly-searching glance upon Tugs and his wife; but nothing in their looks betrayed any treacherous purpose. Chiffin was not however the man to be thrown off his guard by this seeming equanimity on their part.

"How unfortunate you should have gone out just at the moment," exclaimed Tugs. "But perhaps you had the good luck to meet her?"

"Meet who?—Lady Bess?" exclaimed Chiffin, as if utterly unsuspicious.

"No—Madge Somers."

"Ah! she's been then? What news? Why the deuce didn't she wait?"

"She couldn't: she had summut particular to do. Besides, she had on'y a word to say."

"And what's that?" asked Chiffin. "Anything good?"

"Pretty well," rejoined the Blue-ruin Carrier. "Madge says that it will all be right in the course of to-morrow; and she'll be down here by nine in the evening at the latest, when she is certain sure of having good news to tell yer. She says you may make yourself quite easy on that score."

"Perdition take it!" growled Chiffin, affecting to be in a rage. "Somehow or another I fancy that Madge is humbugging me. Which way did she go? I have a deuced good mind to cut after her."

"I didn't see which way she went," answered Tugs. "Besides, she's been gone more than a quarter of an hour; and so you couldn't possibly overtake her, even if you knowed which way she did go."

"Come, Mr. Chiffin," said Mrs. Tugs, looking as amiable as she could through the grimy mask upon her face, "you had better make up your mind to rest patient and be comfortable till to-morrow evening. It isn't wery long to wait; and from what Madge said, it's certain sure you'll hear good news then."

"Well, I suppose I must," returned the Cannibal with the air of one who resigns himself to a temporary disappointment.

"Take another glass of the lush," said the Blue-ruin Carrier, as he passed the bottle. "It's a famous thing to make chaps happy and contented."

"With all my heart," responded Chiffin: and having tossed off the liquor, he lighted his pipe.

The conversation progressed upon indifferent subjects; and while joining in it with seeming unconcern, the Cannibal revolved in his mind the course that he should adopt. That Tugs and his wife meant treachery was evident enough: their conduct in respect to Madge Somers proved this. That they had not discovered the bank-notes in his coat, he felt assured; because if so, and if they had self-appropriated them, there would be no need of that stratagem to keep him still in the barge. He therefore argued that they supposed him to have money concealed about his person, and meant to murder him to obtain it. He had his pistols in his pockets, and they were loaded: he had a great mind to produce them suddenly and shoot both the man and woman at once; but there was the chance of the report being heard by individuals who might be passing along the towing-path, or up in the houses overhanging the canal. Then he thought of suddenly felling the Blue-ruin Carrier with his club, and at once turning round to despatch the wife. But if the first blow should fail in its effect, a desperate struggle might take place: for he knew that the woman was a determined one—while Tugs himself was a man of great muscular power—and therefore the result of such struggle might prove fatal to himself. His chief object was, as a matter of course, to recover possession of his coat: but if he went into the little crib to obtain it, he felt assured that he should be immediately attacked from be-

hind and murdered. Even if he got possession of his coat by means of a stratagem, it would be difficult for him to get safe out of the barge without first making away with Tugs and his wife: for if he pretended to go out for any purpose, they would attack him as he was ascending the ladder and he would be overpowered. All things considered, the Cannibal came to the conclusion that he must anticipate the intention of the Blue-ruin Carrier and Mrs. Tugs by murdering them both. But then *again* recurred the question, how was this to be done?

Suddenly an idea struck him; and he now saw his way clearly enough.

"What a terrible close place this is to live in, to be sure!" he said, in a careless sort of way, taking advantage of a pause in the discourse to make the remark. "I do believe it would kill me outright in a very short time."

"Why, you see, me and my old woman here is accustomed to it," responded Tugs.

"But it's the smell that's as bad as the heat," resumed Chiffin. "Boiled pork and greens is very nice things for dinner; but they leave an uncommon disagreeable odour in the place where they're cooked."

"But we had fried sassages to day," said Mrs. Tugs.

"Well, sassages leaves a smell too," said Chiffin. "And you had cabbages too, mind."

"But the bakker smoke takes all that away," cried the bargeman as he refilled his pipe.

"I am sure Mrs. Tugs don't like all these here smells," said the Cannibal—"greens, and sassages, and bakker smoke, and the canal, and what not—partickler in such a close place as this—do you, Mrs. Tugs? Now, what should you say," he continued with a grim smile upon his countenance, "if so be I was gallant enough to give you a bottle of scent, which to tell you the truth I went out just now to buy at the hairdresser's up in the road?"

"I should say that it was raythor an extro'rn'ary thing for Mr. Chiffin to do," replied the woman, laughing.

"Then that same extro'rn'ary thing I have done," continued the Cannibal: and as he thus spoke he produced an elegantly-cut scent-bottle from the breast-pocket of the coat that he had on.

"Well, did you ever?" exclaimed Mrs. Tugs "If Lady Bess had done such a thing as this, one wouldn't have been astonished, 'cause she's so exceeding perlite."

"We never know," said the Cannibal, appearing to laugh in the merriest good-humour, "whose book we may take a leaf out of. Lend us your fogle, Mrs. Tugs."

"My ankercher, you mean?" she said. "Well, I do think I have got such a thing:"—and she produced a dirty rag which answered the purpose of the article named.

"I like scent very well at a distance," said Chiffin, as he poured a few drops from the little bottle on the handkerchief, holding his head somewhat back as he did so: "but I can't abear it near. Now, just you take and smell this. It's the most teliciousest scent you ever come near in all your life. Put that up to your nose, ma'am."

Mrs. Tugs, who appeared to enjoy the whole proceeding heartily, and of course saw no sinister design in it, took the handkerchief amidst a great deal of laughing, and at once applied it to her nose. At the same instant she fell on the floor of the cabin, with the babe in her arms, as if stricken down by lightning: and also at the very self-same moment, Chiffin's club dealt a tremendous blow on the head of the Blue-ruin Carrier. But this blow so far from being fatal, did not even stun the man, who perhaps possessed a skull of more than ordinary thickness: or else the blow itself descended in a manner that could do little hurt notwithstanding the violence with which it was dealt. For an instant—and only for a single instant—did Tugs totter on his seat; and then springing up with a terrible imprecation, he closed with the Cannibal just as the latter was about to repeat the blow. The table was upset in an instant, and fell over the insensible woman and the stunned child as they lay upon the floor.

For a few moments the struggle with the two men was desperate; and then they fell heavily together. The Cannibal was undermost: and for an instant Tugs nearly throttled him—but with a desperate effort Chiffin threw his adversary off, and then was uppermost in his turn. Still Tugs held him in such a manner that he had not the free use of his arms: he could not reach his club which had dropped from his hands, nor take a pistol from his pocket. For a minute the contest was frightful: the wretches glared upon each other with demoniac looks, as they were thus interlaced by each other's arms—they gnashed their teeth—foam was upon their lips—their struggles and convulsions were the fullest developments of extraordinary muscular power. Again did they roll over: again was the Cannibal in the most perilous position. Another instant, and he would have been strangled by his adversary: but suddenly catching that individual's nose between his teeth, he bit it clean off. The man roared with the pain, and Chiffin was in an instant covered with the blood that streamed down upon him. The next moment the circumstances of the horrible contest were changed again: Tugs was underneath—Chiffin was uppermost—and the former, faint with excruciating pain and loss of blood, relaxed his hold on his diabolic enemy. Then the Cannibal was enabled to catch at his club; and with the tremendous bludgeon he beat out the Blue-ruin Carrier's brains.

Thus ended this horrible combat; and the conqueror stood in the midst of the cabin, wiping his adversary's blood from his face. The woman lay insensible upon the floor—the child was inanimate likewise. Chiffin deliberated with himself for a few moments how he should act. Should he kill the woman, or let her recover as she might? But when she recovered, would she not denounce him as the murderer of her husband? Assuredly she would: and therefore she must die!

Having come to this resolve, after a very brief self-consultation, Chiffin drew his clasp-knife from his pocket—opened it—and then plunged it deep down into the heart of the unfortunate woman. Not a sound escaped her lips: there was a slight convulsive movement of the body, as if a momentary spasm shot through it; and thus she passed from insensibility into death.

Chiffin drew out his clasp-knife from the flesh in which it was embedded—wiped it—and returned

it to his pocket. The blood gushed forth in a torrent, pouring over the babe, and thus covering it with the sanguine tide from that very breast whence it had been wont to receive its nourishment.

The Cannibal, unmoved by the ghastly spectacle which he had himself created—unless indeed it were a grim satisfaction that he experienced in having done the fearful work and thus secured his safety and his vengeance at the same time—now procured water and a towel, and washed as well as he could the stains of murder from his person. This being done, he possessed himself of his coat from the recess, and was about to take his departure, when he bethought himself of the bottle which contained the chloroform. He had placed it on the table the instant he had poured some of its contents on the handkerchief: the table had been upset—and where was the bottle? He searched, and found that it had fallen upon the garments of the woman: the stopper had not come out; and with infinite delight the Cannibal re-possessed himself of an article which had already proved (according to his own notions) so exceedingly useful, and which might therefore be of the same utility on a future occasion.

The ruffian now at length quitted the barge, and was speedily at a distance from the scene of his fearful crime.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LADY OF MANY LOVERS.

It was about half-past ten o'clock on the same night of the frightful tragedy, that Lord Harold Staunton knocked at the door of Evergreen Villa in the Seven Sisters Road. The reader cannot have forgotten that this beautiful little suburban residence was the abode of Miss Emily Archer—*alias* Mademoiselle Emilie d'Alembert—the fascinating *danseuse*, who had succeeded in ensnaring the foolish and frivolous Lord Saxondale in her meshes. Prettily furnished as the villa was previously to her acquaintance with him, it now presented a a spectacle of almost oriental luxury: that is to say, in miniature. Everything that the taste of a most extravagant woman could possibly fancy, or that the infatuation of a reckless spendthrift could supply, in the shape of exquisite furniture, mirrors, pictures, ornaments, nick-nacks, and costly trifles of every variety, was now to be seen within the walls of that villa. The connexion of Lord Saxondale with Miss Archer had been exceedingly brief as to time, but had already proved wonderfully expensive as to money. She had introduced him to a person of whom we shall have to speak more anon, and who was supplying him with funds at a most exorbitant rate of interest: and by far the greater portion of the moneys thus obtained, went to gratify the syren's whims and caprices.

Miss Archer remained upon the stage for several reasons. In the first place she liked the excitement connected with the ballet—she liked the applause bestowed upon the dancers—she liked the flattery and the flirting that took place behind the scenes—and she liked to see the name of Mademoiselle Emilie d'Alembert in the dramatic criticisms in the newspapers. She moreover knew that her connexion with Lord Saxondale could not last for ever; and she regarded her position at the Opera as the means of obtaining a new admirer when circumstances should sooner or later sever her from the present one. She liked, too, to have an opportunity of boasting her good fortune in the presence of the other ballet-dancers; for she fancied that her position was a very brilliant one, and that instead of any shame being attached thereto, it was exceedingly enviable and admirable.

But returning from our digression, we must hasten to describe wherefore Lord Harold Staunton was on the particular night of which we now speak, paying a visit to Evergreen Villa. On knocking at the door he inquired of the servant who answered the summons if Lord Saxondale were within?—but before any answer could be given, that young nobleman himself rushed out of the exquisitely furnished parlour on the ground-floor, exclaiming, "I thought I could not be mistaken: I knew it was your voice! Come in, my dear fellow—I am delighted to see you!"

Lord Harold accordingly entered the parlour, where a supper consisting of all imaginable delicacies and dainties was spread upon the table, and where Emily herself was lounging negligently on a sofa. She was dressed—or rather we should say undressed—in a French wrapper trimmed with the most costly lace; and her beautiful dark hair was flowing in luxuriant masses over a neck more exposed than was consistent with perfect modesty.

"Ah, Lord Harold!" she said, extending her hand to the young nobleman, with whom she was well acquainted, and indeed had been very intimately acquainted on some former occasion: "I am glad to see you at the villa. But, you naughty man, you! what have you been doing? fighting a duel! Oh fie! I am shocked at you."

"It is one of those unfortunate occurrences, Miss Archer," responded Staunton, with a forced gaiety, "which will happen in life. Here is our friend Saxondale who will some day or another have to do the same thing. Who knows, indeed, but that he may be compelled to fight a duel on your account?"

"Oh, that would be amusing!" exclaimed Emily, clapping her hands gleefully, as if some new source of gratification had been suddenly developed to her mind; and she felt as Xerxes might have been supposed to feel had anybody suggested the "new pleasure" for the discovery of which that royal voluptuary offered a reward.

"I am very much obliged to you, my dear Emily," said Lord Saxondale, "for wishing to place my life in jeopardy: but I am not enough tired of you yet to wish to be prematurely cut off from your sweet society,"

"Beautifully expressed!" exclaimed the *danseuse*. "Don't you think your friend Edmund is exceedingly witty and clever, Lord Harold?"

"Oh! I always told him so," was the response: and Staunton, as he gave it, darted at Emily a quick glance of mockery, which she acknowledged by a transient archness of the curling lip. It was as much as to say on Lord Harold's part, "You know he is a fool;" and on Miss Emily's, "Of course I do."

"Thank you both for the compliment," cried

Saxondale, taking it as such. "And now tell me, Harold, how is Deveril? have you heard anything more about him? For I saw by this morning's paper that the report of his death was incorrect—that he survived—and that the wound is not even mortal, though terribly dangerous."

"I know no more on the subject than you do," answered Staunton. "In fact, I am playing at hide-and-seek till the result developes itself in one way or another. For of course until Deveril is pronounced completely out of danger, I am liable to arrest at any moment. But I want to speak to you, Saxondale, most particularly."

"Is it any secret?" asked Edmund, glancing towards Emily, whom he was evidently fearful of offending by excluding her from a knowledge of what was about to be said.

"Just as you may think fit to decide," responded Harold. "It is about that lady in the Spanish dress that you know of——"

"Ah! at the masquerade?" cried Saxondale. "Oh, no—what earthly necessity can there be for secrecy on that head? Besides, as I really have no secrets at all from my dear Emily——"

"I understand," said Lord Harold: "you have already told Miss Archer everything about that little adventure of mine at the masquerade——that is to say, as far as you are acquainted with it."

"Well, to confess the truth, I have told Emily," observed Edmund. "But then she is discretion itself."

"And I do enjoy hearing of intrigues and adventures of that kind!" exclaimed the *danseuse*. "Do tell us, my dear Lord Harold, whether your adventure has turned out as you could wish: for we know nothing beyond the fact that in pursuance of a certain note you met some lady at that masquerade. Of course it is a delicious intrigue—a delightful affair of gallantry! Come, take some champagne, and then tell us all about it. What happened? and who was the fair *inamorata?*"

"Now," resumed Lord Harold after a brief pause, during which he reflected profoundly, "I have not the slightest objection to state the issue of my adventure: but will you, Edmund, promise that whatsoever I may say you will not be shocked or annoyed? In a word, will you give me free permission to speak out frankly?"

"Why, of course," responded Saxondale, surprised at the question. "If it regarded either of my own sisters, or my lady-mother, I should like to hear all the particulars."

"Perhaps your random observation may reach a little nearer home than you imagine," observed Lord Harold.

"Ah! I begin to suspect," ejaculated Saxondale. "Is it possible that my own lady-mother has taken it into her head to play tricks of this sort? Well, now that I bethink me, it *was* exactly her height and figure——"

"And it was she herself!" rejoined Lord Harold.

"This is delightfully amusing!" exclaimed Emily Archer. "You were saying, Edmund, the other day that you wished you had some means of exercising a power over your mother, as you know that she is doing her best with your guardians to make them send you abroad in the diplomatic service or else compel you to go and live down at your old castle in Lincolnshire till you come of age."

"It would be really capital fun," observed Edmund, with disgusting flippancy, "to be put in possession of any secret which would place my mother in my power. By Jove! she should not bully me then: I would very soon be even with her. Therefore, my dear Staunton, so far from offending me, you could not do me a greater service than by telling me all about this adventure of your's."

"It is too complicated at the present moment," replied Lord Harold: "and besides which, I want to obtain some positive proof of the fact that the Spanish Queen at the masquerade was Lady Saxondale. In my own mind I know it was—I am morally certain of the identity: but as I did not see her face, she could of course turn round and indignantly deny the fact: for you will excuse me for saying, my dear Edmund, that your lady-mother is not wanting in what may be termed a bold effrontery."

"Wanting in it!" ejaculated Edmund. "On the contrary, she has got plenty of it. But what sort of proof is it that you require, Harold, in the case we are speaking of?—and can I assist you in any way?"

"It is precisely your assistance that I require," answered Staunton: "and I am sure that you will give it to me all the more readily after what you have been saying—because it is of course very convenient as well as important for you to get your mother completely under your thumb."

"To be sure! What would you have me do?"

"I suppose that you would not hesitate to avail yourself of an opportunity for searching Lady Saxondale's wardrobes, and drawers, and cupboards, for some particular object—would you?"

"Not I indeed! I will ransack and rummage them from top to bottom if it is necessary for your purpose."

"It is," rejoined Harold. "Do you not comprehend? If we could only find the fancy-dress which Lady Saxondale wore at the masquerade, it would be impossible for her to deny her identity with the character of Queen Isabella. The chances are a hundred to one that the dress is secreted some where in her ladyship's apartments."

"And if so, I shall be sure to ferret it out," exclaimed Edmund.

"Oh, do, my dear Edmund," said Emily Archer, with witching accents and looks of cajolery. "I am always afraid that your proud and haughty mother will be separating you from me; and it will be a great relief to my mind to know that you are in possession of a secret which will put her upon her good behaviour."

"I have already promised to do my best in the matter," responded Edmund. "I will go home to-morrow morning and watch for an opportunity to ransack the place: although, by the bye, I did not intend to show my face there for the next week—for the old housekeeper is dead, and somehow or another I have a great aversion to be beneath the same roof with a dead body. It is not, you know, that I am in any way frightened; but it seems as if there was a sickly smell—a nauseating kind of odour. However, I will return to Saxondale House immediately after breakfast to-morrow morning. But still, my dear Harold, I cannot make all this affair out. What on earth did my mother meet you at the Harcourts' for, after writing that letter—unless

it was to arrange matters for a future appointment——"

"Don't question me any more now," interrupted Staunton. "It is a very extraordinary story, and I will give you all the particulars when we have obtained the proof that you are to seek for. So you must restrain your curiosity—and Miss Archer likewise. I suppose I can see you here again to-morrow evening?"

"Yes—but what on earth is to prevent you from staying here with us for a few days until this duel affair is blown over? You will give him house-room—won't you, Emily?"

"Oh! with the greatest pleasure, if his lordship will condescend to accept such hospitality as my humble residence affords:"—but the look of proud satisfaction which the *danseuse* cast around the exquisitely-furnished room, was in flat contradiction to the humility of her words.

"An offer so kindly made cannot be rejected," remarked Staunton, with a smile. "I therefore accept your hospitality, and will instal myself here for a few days."

Throughout the whole of this discourse the champagne bottle was frequently put into requisition; and it was not until a late hour that Staunton was conducted to the chamber appropriated to his use. In the morning breakfast was served at about ten o'clock; and this repast, like the supper of the previous night, consisted of all imaginable delicacies. It was about eleven when Lord Saxondale took his departure for the purpose of accomplishing his pleasant and agreeable little task of endeavouring to discover proofs damnatory to Lady Saxondale's reputation.

Lord Harold Staunton remained alone in the beautifully-furnished parlour with Miss Emily Archer; and no sooner was Edmund out of sight, than a great and sudden change took place in the bearing of these two towards each other. The courteous respect with which Harold had treated the handsome *danseuse* while Edmund was present, now turned into the familiarity of closest intimacy.

"Well, my dear Emily," said Harold, "you have got my friend Edmund tolerably tight and secure in your silken chains. But no wonder: for you are certainly handsomer than ever."

"I would rather receive those few words of compliment from your lips, Harold," was the lady's response, "than ten thousand of the mawkish and insipid flatteries which that frivolous fellow Saxondale bestows upon me. But come, sir—why do you not embrace me for old acquaintance' sake?"

"That shall I do most cheerfully," rejoined Staunton: and he suited the action to the word. "So you find my friend Saxondale somewhat insipid?" he continued, placing himself by the beautiful dancer's side upon the sofa where she was half-reclining in her morning *negligée*.

"Of course you and I can talk these matters over confidentially between us," replied Emily; "and therefore we may admit to each other that of all the frivolous, foolish, conceited coxcombs, Edmund Saxondale is the worst. I really do not know one redeeming quality that he possesses——"

"Except the zeal which he displays in surrounding you with all luxuries and comforts," remarked Harold: "is it not so?"

"But that is conferring no boon upon me," rejoined the *danseuse*: "it is the return he makes for the show of love with which I honour him. I understand he is engaged to be married to your sister? I have seen Lady Florina in her box at the Opera: what a beautiful girl she is! and what a sacrifice to bestow her on such a being as Saxondale!"

"My dear Emily, we must not touch upon that point," returned Lord Harold, somewhat gravely. "Marriages in high life, you know, are not always affairs of the heart, and there is not much trouble taken to assort them with the nicest regard to outward looks or mental qualifications. And now let us change the discourse and talk upon any other topic you please. We have the prospect, I suppose, of being many hours together; and therefore we must render ourselves as agreeable as possible to each other."

"Are you sorry at having this prospect before you?" inquired Emily, with a look of mingled archness and tenderness.

"Sorry indeed! how could that be possible? Are you not as charming as ever—or indeed more charming? for as I said just now, you are handsomer than when you and I used to be tolerably well acquainted a couple of years ago. Tell me, have you been happy since then? But I need scarcely ask. I have seen you bounding with joyous elasticity upon the stage; and I find you occupying a most beautiful little suburban residence. But tell me candidly, my dear Emily—how many lovers have you had during these two years past?"

"Well, I will tell you candidly, my dear Harold," responded the handsome but profligate *danseuse*, with a look of increasing archness most mischievously fascinating and roguishly enchanting: and then, in the same playful mood, she counted off the names as she mentioned them on the tips of her long taper fingers with their rosy-tinted and almond-shaped nails. "First there was Lord Everton: but though he was very liberal and behaved very well indeed, I was obliged to turn him off; for he was so made up with falsities and artificialities—I mean in respect to his toilet—that he was absolutely repulsive to me. Then there was the Rev. Mr. Tarleton, —the fashionable preacher, you know, and whose opinions are so strongly evangelical. He was all very well, though he had not near so much money to bestow upon me as Lord Everton: but he would insist that I should go to his church twice every Sunday. He said that he could preach so much better when he saw me in my pew: he felt that he was preaching for some one whose admiration he most of all loved to secure. He cared nothing about his wife, who is really a very handsome woman, being present in her pew: *that*, he said, was by no means the same thing. Well, I went for five or six Sundays: but I soon got tired of it—and because I flatly refused to go again, we quarrelled and parted. Then circumstances threw me under the protection of Patrick O'Flanaghan, the Member for Blarneyville; and as he drove a dashing four-in-hand, kept plenty of servants, and lived at a first-rate hotel, I thought him a great catch. Now, to tell you the truth, my dear Harold, I was shamefully deceived by that man. He drank up every drop of wine and spirits that I had in my cellar—borrowed every farthing of money I had saved up—and even made me pledge my jewels to provide him with fresh

funds. He was always expecting immense remittances from his Irish estates—but they never came. He was however such an agreeable fellow—so gay, so good-humoured, so full of fun, so sprightly and clever, that I was quite smitten with him. It was a sort of infatuation—so that I believed all he told me. He used to get me to write out his speeches to his dictation; and then he would learn them by heart, and go down to the House of Commons and surprise them all with what seemed to be a genuine outburst of extemporaneous eloquence of the highest order. But on one occasion he made a very fatal mishap. Two distinct questions were coming on for discussion on the same night, and on both of which he intended to speak. For I afterwards found that he had been put in for Blarneyville by the Marquis of Donkeyderry, the patron of the borough; and so he was compelled to speak, and vote, and act, precisely in obedience to his lordship's directions. Well then, he had these two distinct subjects to speak upon for the same evening. One was the Irish Fisheries; and the other was the case of the Rajah of Rumandbrandypoore. So you may see that they were indeed very discrepant. Well, my friend Patrick O'Flanaghan dictated two brilliant speeches, which I wrote down for him very carefully; and he learnt them by heart. He then primed himself with a couple of bottles of champagne, and went down to the House. But there, it appears, he took some ten or a dozen glasses of whiskey-toddy at Bellamy's: so that when the debates came on he did not precisely know whether he stood on his head or his heels. The first question was the Irish Fisheries —when up jumped O'Flanaghan and began vomiting forth a perfect torrent of eloquence. But unfortunately it was the brilliant speech which related to the Rajah of Rumandbrandypoore. The House was astonished—the Speaker sate aghast. On he went, rushing like a madman through the wildest declamations against the East India Company, and drawing such a picture of the wrongs of the unfortunate Rajah of Rumandbrandypoore that he grew perfectly furious with the excitement of indignation into which he lashed himself. There he was, far away amidst the jungles of India—when he ought to have been with the shoals of herrings on the Irish coast! Of course this scene could not continue long: the House, recovering from its consternation, exploded in shouts of laughter—and poor O'Flanaghan was at length made sensible of his error. He fled from the House with precipitation, and next day accepted the Chiltern Hundreds. The Marquis of Donkeyderry then put his butler or his head groom—I forget which, but it's all the same—into the vacant borough of Blarneyville; and poor O'Flanaghan was never heard of any more. I have been told that there is now a billiard-marker at Bath or Cheltenham very much resembling him: but I cannot answer for the truth of it."

Lord Harold Staunton laughed heartily at this anecdote, and complimented Miss Emily on the style in which she told it.

"Having thus lost my Irish lover," she continued, abandoning her hand to that of her companion, "I accepted the protection of a Judge; and he placed me in very handsome apartments at the West End. He was compelled to be exceedingly cautious in visiting me, as he was so well known. He was very liberal, and indulged me to the utmost of his means: so that I speedily regained the jewellery I had lost through the Member for Blarneyville. It appears that my friend the Judge was very fond of making pathetic speeches from the bench when sentencing prisoners. On one occasion, some time before I knew him, a case came before him at the Old Bailey, in which a servant-girl was accused of conniving with a young man to rob her master's house. It transpired during the trial that the servant-girl had become infatuated with the young man—was seduced by him—and secretly admitted him into the house at night to remain with her. On one of those occasions he robbed the premises, while the poor unsuspecting girl was fast asleep. Her innocence, so far as any complicity in the depredations was concerned, was most satisfactorily proven; while her lover was shown to be the guilty party. The Judge, in sentencing him and discharging her, made a long and most pathetic speech, showing the evils which arose from giving way to sensual passions; and he expatiated in such terms upon the dreadful effects of loose principles on the part of men and frailty on that of women, that he drew tears from every one in the court. In short, it was a perfect moral essay, and seemed to prove that the learned Judge who could deliver such sublime sentiments must himself be the most immaculate of men."

"But how does this anecdote apply to any thing in connexion with yourself, my dear Emily," asked Lord Harold; "since it happened long before you knew your Judge?"

"You shall hear. I had been under his lordship's protection for about three months, when I happened to discharge my housemaid and took another, the new-comer having an excellent character from her last place. But only conceive the scene which ensued, when my Judge, on arriving one evening to sup with me, was instantaneously recognized by the new housemaid, who was the very same servant-girl he had so pathetically lectured at the Old Bailey. The consequence was the evaporation of the learned Judge from my lodgings; and the next day he enclosed me a hundred-pound-note as a token of adieu. I then passed under the protection of Mr. Walter of the Opera, and thence under that of Lord Saxondale. Such, my dear Harold, is a true and faithful narrative of my proceedings during the two past years."

"And now tell me, my dear Emily," said Staunton, —"because I am really interested in you,—have you managed to save any money during all this time?"

"I had saved a little previous to my acquaintance with O'Flanaghan: but he got it all out of me. Since then I could save nothing until within the last week or two; and now I am making a beginning again. But you don't know how money slips away with women in my position. When I look back and think of what I might have saved, I wonder where it has all gone, and why it has *not* been saved. Sometimes I think what a fool I am to spend so fast and so recklessly: but it is all in vain to make good resolutions for the future. The fact is, women placed as I am can't save permanently. As I just now said, I am saving at present; but I dare say that something will arise at no distant time to sweep away all these savings."

"And tell me, Emily, do none of the young ladies connected with the Opera, and who are under the protection of gentlemen, manage to save?"

"Not one out of one hundred ever does," was the reply. "The truth is, what they get at one time from the doating foolishness of some of their admirers, they themselves lavish at another time in their own infatuated folly upon penniless lovers. But this strain of conversation is a mournful one for me. I tell you what it does, Harold—it makes me think of the future: and *that* is something I do not like to think of. I know that as long as I am young, and handsome, and attractive, I shall be enabled to live in a handsome house, keep my carriage, and be surrounded with every luxury: but when my beauty begins to wane——Ah! then it will be very different! Now, this is the reflection which sometimes creeps in upon my mind, and saddens me deeply—deeply. Yes, it steals in like a spectre at a festival,—steals in, I say, even at those times when I have everything to make me happy: it comes like the gust of an ice-wind penetrating into the warm and perfumed atmosphere of a brilliantly lighted saloon. Do you comprehend me?"

"I do, Emily," responded Harold. "But surely it is your fault that there should be a cause for this apprehension? You have many opportunities of saving while you are young and beautiful and courted: why do you not avail yourself of them?"

"Ah! why—why—it is so easy to ask that question *why*! Ask the drunkard, when racked with the headache after his night's debauch, why he does not reform himself; and if he answer truly he will say it is because he has not the moral courage. Why, for instance, do *you* not reform your habits? why are you extravagant, and wild, and always in debt? Now you see I am speaking plainly: but it is not to offend you—merely to make your own conduct serve as an illustration to account for mine. I have got into certain habits of extravagance, and cannot get out of them. If I have a whim it must be gratified, provided I have the means; and therefore I can scarcely hope ever to save continuously and put by a store for the future. I am saving now, as I have told you: but if you, for instance, wanted money at this moment, I would give you all my savings—because I like you."

"You are a good girl, my dear Emily," responded Harold, bestowing upon her another embrace. "But if I have been questioning you in this way, it was not for the purpose of ascertaining your means with a view of self-appropriating them. I return you my thanks all the same."

"Well, the conversation has taken a turn to make me rather dull," said Emily, starting up from the sofa: "let us go and walk in the garden. The fresh air and the flowers will cheer and enliven us—at least they will have this effect upon me. You do not know how fond women in my position are of gardens, and flowers, and the country. And therefore," she added with a smile, "it cannot be said that our tastes are utterly perverted and depraved along with our morals."

Thus speaking, with all her wonted mischievous archness and roguish gaiety, the handsome *danseuse* led the way into the garden.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE RANSACKING OF THE WARDROBE-ROOM.

WHILE the preceding scene was taking place at Evergreen Villa, all London was ringing with the news of a frightful crime committed during the past night in a barge moored in that part of the canal which intersects Agar Town. It appeared that at a somewhat early hour that morning, a couple of Excise-officers, in consequence of certain information received, had proceeded to pay a visit to that barge; but on descending the hatchway into the little cabin, they were horrified on beholding that spectacle which has been already described to the reader. The bargeman lay on one side of the cabin, with his head so frightfully beaten and smashed and so covered with clotted blood, that it was scarcely recognizable as that of a human being; and a minuter search showed that the wretched victim's nose had been bitten completely off and was lying at a little distance. On the other side of the cabin lay the bargeman's wife, who had evidently been murdered by a stab in the breast; and as if nothing should be wanting to complete this tragedy of horrors, the infant child had been smothered in the blood which had poured from its unfortunate mother.

Such was the account which was now horrifying all London: but from the flying rumours which prevailed, it did not appear that suspicion attached itself to any particular person or persons. The deed seemed to be shrouded in a dark mystery. There were all the evidences of a fearful struggle having taken place in the cabin; but the murderer or murderers had left no trace that might afford a clue to their discovery. Nevertheless, the most active officers of the detective force were already on the alert to endeavour to find some circumstances that should place them on the right scent.

Such was the narrative which young Lord Saxondale heard from some tradesman whose shop he entered to make a purchase in the vicinage of Park Lane. Thence he proceeded home, and straightway ascended to the drawing-room where his mother usually sat. Her ladyship was there, apparently engaged with a book, but in reality thinking over the various grave and serious subjects which agitated in her mind. She was just in one of those humours when the presence of Edmund was intolerable to her—for what reason she herself best knew. She did not therefore say anything to encourage him to remain in the room; and he accordingly resolved to avail himself of this opportunity to pursue the search for which purpose he had come. Having ascertained that his sisters were in their own apartment—and thus finding the coast to be clear—he ascended to his mother's private chambers.

An exquisitely furnished boudoir opened into the sleeping apartment; and beyond this was the wardrobe-room where her ladyship's dresses and articles of apparel were kept. If any of the maid-servants had been in the rooms at the time, Lord Saxondale was prepared with some excuse: but as he found no one there, the necessity did not arise for displaying his ingenuity in that respect. It naturally struck him that if his mother had such good reasons as he supposed her to have, for put

ting the masquerade dress altogether out of sight, it was sure to be under lock and key. He did not therefore take much trouble in investigating those wardrobes which were unlocked, but bestowed his attention upon the cupboards and closets that were closed. His hope had been that one of his own keys would fit these locks; but in this he was disappointed —and he therefore saw the necessity of obtaining possession of his mother's keys by some means or another. Issuing forth from her chambers again, he sauntered leisurely down the stairs, revolving in his mind three or four projects for obtaining possession of the keys. He likewise thought of repairing to a locksmith and purchasing a quantity of keys: but this latter plan he abandoned in consequence of the strange suspicion it was so well calculated to excite—or at all events he decided upon only having recourse to it in case other means should fail.

He returned to the room where her ladyship was seated; and on observing him re-enter she could not control a gesture of impatience and a look of annoyance.

"You appear a little out of sorts, my dear mother," he observed, with a subdued irony of accent: for he had not failed to notice that his presence was not altogether agreeable.

"It is so unusual a thing for you to seek my company now," replied Lady Saxondale coldly, "that I cannot help thinking you must have some ulterior object in view."

"I only came to have a little chat, my lady-mother," answered Edmund: and the glance which he threw around, settled upon a bunch of keys lying on the table at which her ladyship was seated. "Have you heard the account of the horrid murder which has been committed in a barge on some canal?"

"I have not seen the newspaper yet," returned Lady Saxondale.

"I don't think it is in the newspaper—in fact it can't be; for it was only discovered this morning:"—and Edmund then proceeded to retail such particulars as he had learnt at the tradesman's shop.

Lady Saxondale made some remark upon the horrible nature of the case, and then appeared to bestow all her attention upon her book.

"There will be a hanging-affair for that, I dare say," resumed Edmund with a negligent yawn. "For although there seems as yet to be no clue to the murderers, I have no doubt they will be found out in the long run: because it isn't often that a murder does go undiscovered. Now, isn't that curious though? but it's really the case when I come to think of it."

Lady Saxondale raised her eyes, and looked at her son, as he thought, in a somewhat peculiar manner: but the next instant he supposed it could only be fancy on his part—and indeed her eyes were almost immediately bent down upon the book again.

"When is old Mabel to be buried?" he inquired after a pause.

"Why do you ask?" said Lady Saxondale quickly

"Oh! only out of curiosity. I suppose by way of saying something—for you don't appear to be very much inclined for conversation."

"I am sorry to say that your conversation is seldom of a very entertaining or edifying character."

"Thank you, my dear mother, for the compliment. The ladies don't think so generally: for I know I am a precious great favourite amongst them."

"With what class of ladies?" asked Lady Saxondale, her lips curling with a contempt she made no endeavour to conceal.

Edmund was about to give some impertinent reply, when a footman entered the apartment to announce that Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow had just arrived, and had been shown into the Green Drawing-room.

"Whew!" was the prolonged sound which Lord Saxondale sent out from his lips at this intelligence: then, as the footman retired, he said, "There's not much difficulty in guessing what that old fogy and that bustling pettifogger have come here for."

"How dare you speak thus of your guardians?" exclaimed her ladyship. "You ought to treat them with respect."

"Oh, yes! fine respect indeed, when they are plotting all kinds of things against me. But perhaps ——However we shall see!"—and he stopped short abruptly.

Lady Saxondale looked very hard at him, evidently to fathom his meaning, which had a sort of mysterious self-sufficiency and assurance in it that for the moment somewhat troubled her: then turning away with a look of disdain, as if she would not condescend to bandy any more words with one whom she certainly detested, she swept majestically out of the room.

But the keys? there they were—left upon the table! Her ladyship had forgotten them, or else had not dreamt of the necessity of taking them with her.

"Egad! it was high time that I should discover my mother's secrets," muttered Saxondale to himself as he triumphantly laid hold of the keys. "Petersfield and Marlow here—eh? They no doubt think that they will dispose of me just as they choose: but perhaps they will find the difference However, I must not delay."

Thus speaking, he hastened from the apartment—rushed up the stairs—and re-entered his mother's private chambers. The keys, of which he had possessed himself, opened the locks that had previously resisted his endeavours. He examined wardrobe, cupboard, closet, and drawers—he scrutinized the various costumes and packages contained therein: but no Spanish dress could he discover. His investigation had lasted at least half-an-hour, and he was about to retreat from the chambers, when he observed a trunk standing in the window-recess of the wardrobe-room. He was some minutes before he could find the right key to open this trunk; but at length he succeeded—and lifting the lid, observed that it contained the more costly articles of the family plate which were not in general use, but were only brought out on grand occasions. He removed some of the articles, and at length caught sight of the object of his search at the bottom of the trunk. With an ejaculation of joy he drew forth the dress, unrolled it, and became convinced beyond the possibility of doubt that it was the same one which he had seen worn by the lady who had joined Lord Harold Staunton at the masquerade.

He was now all in a flutter of trepidation and excitement lest Lady Saxondale or any of the maid-servants should appear to interrupt his proceedings; and it was with no very great care that he replaced in the trunk the massive silver articles which he had removed. This being done he locked the trunk again; and folding up the dress into as small a compass as possible, wrapped it in his handkerchief, and flew away with it to his own room. There he left it for a moment; and descending to the apartment whence he had taken the keys, deposited them on the table where he had found them. He then sped back to his own chamber, and enveloping the dress in a large sheet of paper, fastened it with a string. Summoning his valet, he ordered the domestic to follow him with the parcel; and issuing from the house, proceeded to the nearest cab-stand, where he entered a vehicle—took charge of the packet—and sent his servant back home.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when Lord Saxondale returned to Evergreen Villa; and the moment Lord Harold Staunton and Emily Archer beheld him rush up the front garden with the parcel in his hand, they knew full well that his mission had been a successful one. The envelope was torn off—the dress was revealed—and Staunton at once pronounced it to be that which was worn by his masked companion at the Duke of Harcourt's ball.

"Now we have the proof!" exclaimed Saxondale, as proud and rejoiced as if he had accomplished one of the noblest and best of deeds. "You will keep your promise, Harold, and tell us all that remains to be revealed in respect to my lady-mother. For it now becomes more imperative than ever that I should have the means for defying her. Would you believe it? when I left Saxondale House she was in deep consultation with that prosy hum-drum Petersfield, and that talkative busy-body Marlow—all three of them no doubt laying their heads together to dispose of me just as it suits their good will and pleasure."

"I will keep my word and tell you everything," replied Lord Harold

He accordingly narrated to his astonished listeners the whole of his adventures with Lady Saxondale, in respect to the scene at the masquerade—the instructions she had given him relative to Deveril—the reason he had therefore sought a duel with the young artist—and the manner in which he was treated by Lady Saxondale when he called upon her, as already described. Astonished indeed were those listeners; for they were little prepared to hear that the circumstance of the duel was in any way mixed up with the incidents of the masquerade at Harcourt House.

"It is not perhaps a very pleasant tale for a son to hear of his own mother," added Lord Harold Staunton; "and I take heaven to witness that you never would have heard it, Edmund, if I had been treated otherwise by her ladyship. But after all the indignity I experienced at her hands, you can scarcely wonder if I sought to be revenged. My vengeance is now consummated: I desire no more. I have made you acquainted, Edmund, with your mother's crime—for a crime assuredly it is that she committed, in thus seeking the death of young William Deveril. She is now in your power! You may control her and coerce her at will: she can no longer deny her identity with the heroine of the masquerade. You need not fear therefore the plots and schemings which her ladyship may have concocted with Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow. But tell me—will there be any loss of friendship between you and me in consequence of all that I've now explained to you?"

"Loss of friendship, my dear Harold!" cried Edmund, astonished at the question. "How is it possible you could think of such a thing? You had a perfect right to fall in love with my mother if you chose; and I am only sorry she has used you so scurvily. As for seeking to be revenged on her by putting her in my power, the effect is to do me the greatest possible service: and therefore so far from entertaining any ill feeling towards you, I consider myself immensely your debtor. We will pass a jovial evening: Emily does not go to the Opera to-night, and we will draw a few champagne-corks before we go to bed. To-morrow I will pay another visit to my lady-mother—see what she may have to say—and then if she holds out any more threats about sending me abroad, or compelling me to live at the castle in Lincolnshire, I will let her see that I am not to be trifled with."

We need not linger over this scene, which in many respects is a painful one to describe. Let us hasten to observe that Miss Emily Archer, Lord Saxondale, and Lord Harold Staunton sat down to a delicious banquet at about six o'clock, and remained at table until a late hour. On the following day Lord Harold learnt by a paragraph in the newspaper that Mr. Deveril was now altogether out of danger; and he therefore no longer feared to return to his lodgings in Jermyn Street. He bade farewell to Miss Archer, with whom he exchanged significant looks as he thanked her for all the marks of kindness and hospitality she had bestowed upon him at Evergreen Villa; and then he accompanied Lord Saxondale to the West End.

"I should like to know as soon as possible what takes place between yourself and your mother," he said, when they reacned the point where they were to separate.

"Let us dine together this evening," answered Saxondale. "I dare say I shall have something to tell you. Emily goes to the Opera to-night—and so I am well disposed to amuse myself."

The two young noblemen accordingly settled an appointment, and then parted—the one returning to his lodgings in Jermyn Street, the other bending his way to Saxondale House.

It was a little past noon when Edmund again crossed the threshold of the stately mansion; and he was at once informed by the hall-porter that her ladyship had ordered that when he came in he was to be told she wished to see him on very important business. This was exactly what he wanted: he was desirous of bringing matters to an issue, and literally panted for an opportunity to display his power over his mother. Accordingly, without loss of time he hurried up to the apartment where she was seated. He found her alone, as on the previous day; and he saw by the cold hauteur of her looks that there was a sternly settled purpose in her mind.

"Edmund," she said, "have the goodness to sit down and let us see if we can talk quietly and peaceably together for a few minutes."

"Well, my dear lady-mother," he answered with his usual flippancy of style, as he threw himself with a languid air in a half-reclining position upon a sofa, "you can talk away as much as ever you like, and I will listen. You needn't be afraid of fatiguing me; because it suits my purpose very well to lie here for the next half-hour."

"Even at the commencement you put on this insufferable corcombry," resumed her ladyship. "Do you really think, Edmund, that it is becoming, or calculated to inspire respect? Believe me, you only render yourself ridiculous. But it was not on this subject that I wished to speak. Are you attending?"

"With the same respect and earnestness as if it was to the fag-end of a three hours' sermon and you was the preacher. But you mustn't think I wasn't attending because I had my eyes shut: I can always hear best like that."

"Now, Edmund," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, her cheeks flushing with anger, "I began by speaking kindly to you, and you answer me in this impertinent style. You appear to think that there is something very fine in defying me: but depend upon it that you will discover your mistake. Now tell me, once for all, shall we converse as if we were on good terms with each other, or will you have me explain what I have to say in the form of commands which are to be enforced?"

"Let it be whichever way you choose," answered Edmund, with a prolonged yawn. "I dare say it will be all the same in the long run."

"If you treat the matter thus, I will without farther preface tell you what has been resolved upon by your guardians and assented to by myself:"—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she drew herself up with a haughty stateliness. "The post of Attaché to the Embassy at Berlin has been placed at your disposal: and it has been accepted on your behalf by Lord Petersfield——"

"How exceedingly kind!" interjected Edmund, laughing in a subdued manner with his cracked voice.

"In three days you will set out," continued Lady Saxondale, not appearing to pay the slightest heed either to his observation or his laugh, "to undertake the duties of this honourable post which you are to fill. To-morrow her Most Gracious Majesty holds a levee, on which occasion it is the desire of myself and your guardians that you be presented to kiss the royal hands."

"The royal fiddlesticks," observed Edmund, with another laugh.

"To kiss the royal hands, I repeat," continued Lady Saxondale, accentuating her words, "on receiving this appointment. The Foreign Secretary has kindly undertaken to present you. You will therefore lose no time in making all requisite arrangements for your presentation, and also for your departure. It is proposed by your guardians that two hundred pounds a month shall be paid you by a banker at Berlin to meet your current expenses: for of course you will proceed thither and also dwell there in a style becoming your rank. These are the communications that I have to make; and I will add, Edmund, that I do most sincerely hope you will enter with a good spirit upon the course thus marked out."

"And what if I refuse to comply with these autocratic ukases which your ladyship has been issuing?'

"I regret that you should compel me to enter into any explanation with regard to the alternatives: but if it must be so, they shall be described concisely, though firmly. Now listen:"—then after a minute's pause which her ladyship made to give solemnity to the proceeding, she said, "If you refuse to yield obedience to the wishes of your guardians and myself, it is the settled resolve of Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow to exert all the powers with which the law invests them; and those perhaps will be found to be greater and stronger than you have an idea of. In the first place it will be by a royal command that you are enjoined to proceed to Berlin in the capacity already named; and disobedience to the Queen's mandate may be followed by unpleasant consequences. In the second place, it is resolved by Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow that not another shilling shall be paid to you in the shape of allowance till you come of age, save and except under the conditions already laid down; and if you attempt to raise any money from usurers, advertisements will be inserted in the journals cautioning all such persons to beware how they deal with a minor."

"Has my dear lady-mother anything more to say?" asked Edmund, with an air of *nonchalant* indifference.

"Nothing, sir," was Lady Saxondale's response: and she rose from her seat as if to quit the room.

"But I have something more to say—and a good deal too," at once rejoined Edmund. "In the first place, it is not my intention to quit England at all; and therefore you had better get Lord Petersfield to undo as quickly as he can all that he may have done in respect to this embassy-business. Secondly, you will have the kindness to send for Marlow and Malton, and tell them that if they dare attempt any coercive measures with me, they shall be made to suffer for it. Thirdly, so far from stopping my allowance, you will at once get it doubled; and it will not *then* be necessary to put any advertisements into the newspapers, because I shall not require the assistance of usurers. Fourthly, you would do as well to have my debts paid at once, so as to prevent the annoyance of duns coming to the house."

Lady Saxondale remained standing in the middle of the room while her son thus spoke; and a visible trouble came upon her—for she now saw by his manner that he did not feel himself so completely at her mercy as she wished him to be. Perhaps he had fathomed one of the many secrets which agitated in her bosom? But if so, which was it? Knowing how intimate he was with Lord Harold Staunton, it naturally occurred to her that the affair of the masquerade and the circumstances of the duel had been revealed to him.

"And pray, sir," she said, conquering the outward appearance of her emotions, "by whose advice are you acting, or upon what pillar are you supporting yourself, when thus coolly defying your mother—your guardians—even your Sovereign?"

"If you must know," returned Edmund, "it may be as well to put you out of all suspense at once. You need not think, my dear lady-mother, that all your tricks have escaped my knowledge. I will mention a name that perhaps may be sufficient to show you what I do know, and convince you of the prudence of leaving off your tyrannical conduct towards me."

"And that name, sir?" asked Lady Saxondale, nerving herself to hear it without agitation: for she full well divined what name he was about to speak.

Edmund looked with insolent hardihood in her face; and with a still more impudent kind of leer, he said boldly, "Lord Harold Staunton."

"Ah, I understand you!" cried Lady Saxondale, assuming a look of sovereign contempt blended with haughty indignation. "That unhappy young man has had his wits turned by the duel——"

"A duel which my dear lady-mother was the secret means of provoking."

"You dare not repeat so base a calumny, vile boy!" exclaimed her ladyship, for one moment becoming livid with rage, and then turning the colour of a peony.

"Calumny indeed?" echoed Saxondale: "it is the truth—and I can prove it."

"You prove it?" cried her ladyship: and her splendid dark eyes were rivetted with scrutinizing intentness upon her son.

"Yes: prove it,—prove that you were the lady that I myself saw in the Spanish dress at the masquerade—prove that you wrote the letter making the appointment with Harold there—prove likewise that the name of William Deveril in another letter, or rather in a mere envelope, was penned by the same hand that wrote the first epistle! All these things can I prove as easy——"

"Edmund, is it possible that you believe the calumnies uttered by a worthless young man like Staunton, in preference to the solemn assurances of your mother?"

"Ah! but what about the dress?" cried Edmund, his countenance becoming wickedly malignant.

"The dress?" echoed her ladyship; and for an instant a suspicion of the truth flashed to her mind: but the next moment banishing it as untenable, she said coldly, "I do not comprehend you."

"Then you very soon shall," rejoined Edmund: "and not to mince matters any longer, you must know that I ferretted out the beautiful Spanish dress from the great plate chest in your wardrobe room——"

"Infamous boy! reptile that I have cherished to sting me!" cried Lady Saxondale. "If you have perpetrated this atrocity, I will be avenged—I will have a terrible vengeance——a vengeance of which you little dream——But tell me, tell me quick," she said, now speaking with hysterical impotuosity, "have you told Lord Harold——"

"Told him? to be sure I have!" answered Edmund flippantly. "Why, it was at his instigation that I searched for it, while you were busied yesterday with old Petersfield and the lawyer."

"Then, Edmund, do you know what you have done?" asked Lady Saxondale, in a deep voice and with an ineffable look: "you have placed your mother's virtue in the power of an unprincipled young man—you have abandoned me to the will and pleasure of Harold Staunton."

"Then why did you put yourself into such a position?" cried Saxondale, utterly unmoved by the sudden discomfiture which he had thus produced on the part of her ladyship. "Don't you see, mother, it's all very easy to take me to task for being wild, and gay, and thoughtless, and extravagant: but you do not appear to be over-circumspect yourself. You want to get me sent from the country to keep me out of mischief: but I think that you ought to take yourself out of the reach of mischief at the same time. However, I tell you very candidly I do not want to have any words: let us come to an understanding. You must do what I want, and I will keep your secret. You have nothing to fear from Harold. He says that he is sufficiently avenged for any slight you have put upon him, by betraying you to your own son; so the thing can be hushed up quiet enough—and all I want is for you to fulfil the conditions I laid down just now."

Lady Saxondale stood gazing speechlessly upon the young man as he thus addressed her; and by the varying expression of her countenance it was evident that a flight of strange, conflicting, and painful thoughts swept through her brain. She longed to say something and do something—but which she dared not either say or do. She looked as if she had it in her power to strike a terrible blow—but that she felt she herself would be crushed by the rebound. Therefore her ideas of loftiest vengeance sank down into a feeling of bitterest hate, which was reflected in her looks as she still kept them fixed upon her son.

"You have done all this," she said, in the same low deep voice as before; "and you did not take into account all that you owe me? You had no gratitude—no love—no respect: you have dragged your mother through the mire of disgrace, and shame, and dishonour: you have exposed her to an unprincipled young man, for whose keeping the secret there is no possible guarantee. All this have you done; and even now your heart is not touched—your soul is not smitten. Edmund, if I told you that I hate you, you would deserve it—and I do not know that I should be telling an untruth."

"You are uncommon candid, at all events," he replied, with the utmost indifference. "I could retort a great deal; but perhaps it is not worth while. The best thing is for us to settle the matter quietly. You get Petersfield to have the appointment cancelled: tell Marlow and Malton you are highly delighted with me—that I have promised to reform—and that you believe me—or anything else you like to invent: only let me be left alone, with plenty of money, my debts paid, and no more bother or nonsense such as we have been having lately. On these conditions I keep your secret."

"And if I refuse?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Then I must declare open war. First I shall tell Juliana and Constance what a charming example of a mother they have got——"

"Enough, enough!" ejaculated the unhappy woman: "it is indeed *too* much! Edmund, you have placed me in the humiliating condition of being compelled to accede to your terms. Go then—everything you wish shall be done. But beware how you drag me down still farther into the depths of disgrace! Stop—one word more ere you depart. If to the ears of your sisters you breathe a syllable of all this, I swear that——But no matter: things must take their course."

With these words Lady Saxondale hurried from the room; and soon afterwards Edmund sallied forth to make some purchases (upon credit) for Emily Archer, ere he kept his appointment to pass the evening with Lord Harold Staunton.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.—THE PORTRAIT.

LADY SAXONDALE retired to her own private apartments in a state of mind all the tortures and goading anguish of which can be more easily imagined than described: and going straight to the plate-chest, she indeed discovered that the Spanish dress, which she had hidden with so much care, had disappeared. She sat down in the middle of the wardrobe-room; and the scalding tears trickled down her cheeks. It must have been a terrible condition of feelings which could make that proud woman weep: for even to herself, or in the solitude of her own chamber, was she ever loath to give way to what she considered the weakness of her sex. Not long however did she remain thus overpowered by the strength of her emotions; but wiping away the tears, she passed into her boudoir and there penned the following letter to her son's senior guardian:—

"My dear Lord Petersfield,

"I have just had an interview with Edmund of so highly a satisfactory nature, that it is with feelings of the sincerest joy I am enabled to communicate the circumstance to you. I explained to him the intentions which you and Mr. Marlow had formed concerning him; whereupon he threw himself at my feet, acknowledged that he had been wild, undutiful, and extravagant—but besought and implored not only my forgiveness but that of his guardians. The idea of being separated from me and his sisters for a lengthened period, by being compelled to accept this post at berlin, afflicted him profoundly. He declared that when travelling on the Continent for only a few months, some time ago, his thoughts were incessantly fixed upon home; and he says that however great his faults may have been, this exile into which it is proposed to send him will be far to severe a chastisement. In short, he faithfully promises a thorough and complete amendment, if his guardians and myself will accord him

our pardon and give him another trial. He frankly avowed that he had contracted several debts, but with the best feeling of honour besought that they might be paid at once, so as to rescue him from the fangs of usurers.

"Under all these circumstances, my dear Lord Petersfield, I ventured to take it upon myself to promise full and complete pardon; and I am sure your lordship, in the kindness of your heart, and your friendship towards me, will sanction my proceeding. It will be easy for your lordship to procure the cancelling of the appointment, which fortunately is not yet gazetted; and as for Edmund's debts, I will send Mr. Marlow a list of them in the course of a few days, so that in the mean time you will kindly sanction their payment: for of course whatever you and I agree upon, Marlow and Malton will assent to.

"You recollect, my dear Lord Petersfield, what I hinted relative to Francis Paton: for I am fearful the great personal beauty of this youth has made some little impression upon Juliana's heart; and therefore as your lordship has testified an interest in the lad, I leave you to deal with him as you think best. I therefore send him with this note, and shall tell him to wait and see if there be any answer; so that your lordship may have him into your presence and speak to him. At all events his prompt removal from Saxondale House is most advisable; but as I yesterday hinted, this object should be accomplished in a way the least calculated to arouse Juliana's spirit and make her adopt any rash step. It is not however for me to dictate, nor scarcely even suggest any particular course to a nobleman of your lordship's profound wisdom and large experience.

"Believe me to remain, my dear Lord Petersfield,

"Your very faithful and obliged friend,

"HARRIET SAXONDALE."

Having duly sealed this letter and addressed it to the Right Honourable Lord Petersfield, Portman Square, Lady Saxondale descended to the drawing-room and rang the bell. A footman promptly answered the summons; and she bade him tell Frank to come to her immediately. The footman quitted the room; but full ten minutes elapsed without his re-appearance—so that Lady Saxondale, growing impatient, rang the bell violently once more. The footman now returned, apologizing for the delay, but assuring her ladyship that he had searched everywhere throughout the mansion for the young page, but without being able to find him; and yet it was certain that he had not gone out, for the two hats which he had in wear were hanging in their accustomed places.

"But he must have gone out, if you cannot find him in the house," said Lady Saxondale. "The moment he returns, let him be ordered to come to me."

Again the footman retired; and so soon as she was alone, Lady Saxondale felt a strange suspicion arise in her mind. Her countenance became pale as death; and starting from her seat, she proceeded at once to the apartment where her daughters were in the habit of sitting together, as stated on a former occasion. There she found Constance alone;—and in a casual manner, without appearing to have any particular object in view, she asked where Juliana was. Constance replied that her sister had a very bad headache, and had gone to lie down. Lady Saxondale bit her lip almost till the blood came: for the dire suspicion which had already entered her mind, was now strengthened. Leaving the apartment where Constance was apparently employed in reading a book, but between the leaves of which she had thrust a letter from the Marquis of Villebelle the instant her mother had entered the room—Lady Saxondale ascended to the storey where her daughter's bed-chambers were situated. She tried the door of Juliana's room, but found it locked; and then Juliana's voice from inside asked who was there.

"It is I," responded Lady Saxondale, adopting her usual tone. "Constance tells me that you are unwell——"

"I shall be better presently, my dear mother," answered Juliana from within.

Lady Saxondale thereupon quitted the immediate vicinage of the door; but instead of descending from that storey at once, she went and concealed herself in another room—and there, keeping the door ajar, watched her elder daughter's chamber. In a few minutes she saw Juliana come forth—cast a hurried look up and down the passage—and then retreat into her room again. The next instant Francis Paton issued thence and sped down stairs.

Lady Saxondale's suspicion was now thoroughly confirmed. But, oh! to what a harrowing pitch were her feelings wrought up as she thus received the unmistakable proof of her elder daughter's shame. For a few moments she stood rivetted to the spot—petrified—statue-like: then in obedience to a sudden impulse, she proceeded to Juliana's chamber. The door was not locked now: she entered—and her daughter, who was in a voluptuous *deshabillée*, at once turned pale and became troubled as she saw by her mother's look that everything was at least suspected, if not actually discovered. But this look of uneasiness was only momentary, and was succeeded by one of mingled indifference and hardihood, as she turned aside towards the mirror and began fastening up the luxuriant masses of her glossy raven hair.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly clutching her daughter violently by the arm, "you are lost—you are undone—unhappy girl that you are!"

Again for an instant did that look of trouble and shame appear upon Juliana's countenance at thus acquiring the certainty that everything was known: but it was succeeded by an expression of even bolder effrontery, as she said, "The less, mother, that we interfere with each other the better."

"Ah! are you all going to hurl defiance at me?" muttered the wretched Lady Saxondale, as she thought to herself that Juliana also was acquainted with some secret which emboldened her to adopt this mien and manner of defiance: and relinquishing her hold upon the young lady's arm, she staggered back against the wall of the chamber with a feeling so dread and so inexplicable that she knew not whether she was about to faint or shriek forth in hysterical frenzy.

Juliana went on arranging her magnificent raven hair before the mirror: but still her hands trembled—there was a varying flush upon the delicate olive of her complexion, a certain restless flashing of the eyes, and a troubled heaving of the superb bust which the morning wrapper left more than half revealed. For although determined to put the boldest countenance upon her amour with the young page, and to hurl all requisite defiance at her mother in asserting her own independence, yet she still was not so completely depraved as to be enabled to contemplate without emotion the detection of her shame.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, speedily recovering her presence of mind—or rather, we should say, an unnatural degree of composure,—"tell me, I conjure you—tell me, unhappy girl—am I to suppose the worst—the very worst?"

"You are to suppose, mother, exactly as much as you happen to know," was the coldly insolent reply given by her daughter. "I presume you have been watching my chamber; and therefore it is useless to deny anything, even did I consider it worth while to condescend to a denial."

"Oh! this is enough to drive me mad!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again losing all power of self-command and wringing her hands in mingled rage and anguish. "Good heavens! an intrigue with a menial——"

"And why not I with a menial, as you contemptuously denominate him, as well as yourself with an artist?"—and as Juliana thus spoke, she bent a look of the haughtiest defiance upon her mother.

"Ah! I understand," muttered Lady Saxondale, with white and quivering lips. "I have been betrayed:"—and she alluded to Edmund, thinking that he had told his sisters everything which she had so positively enjoined him to keep secret.

"For your satisfaction and peace of mind in one respect," said Juliana, "I can faithfully promise that no one has betrayed you; but I and Constance happened to overhear every word which took place the other day between yourself and Mr. Gunthorpe. And therefore I repeat, if a lady of quality can condescend to offer herself as the paramour of an artist, whose humble calling she affects to despise, there can be no harm in her daughter taking a leaf out of the same book."

"Juliana," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot upon the floor, "that I am as pure and immaculate in respect to that young man to whom you have alluded——"

"Yes, my dear mother; but it is not your own merit that you are so," responded Juliana, with a contemptuous sneer. "You must not take to yourself the credit of a virtue which you do not possess: for if you did not throw yourself into William Deveril's arms, it was for the simple reason that they were not open to receive you."

Lady Saxondale sank down upon a chair like one annihilated. She felt all that was disgraceful, demoralizing, and unnatural in this scene on the part of a mother and her daughter. Her veins appeared to run with molten lead—her brain was on fire. It was a subdued frenzy that she experienced—a frenzy all the torture of which was concentrated within and testified itself in no other external wildness than the workings of her countenance. She screamed not—she shrieked not—she did not dash herself on the floor nor against the wall; but yet for a few minutes she felt as if she were a prey to a raging madness.

Juliana the while continued to dress her hair; but she also felt that it would be an infinite relief when this scene was over, no matter how it should end.

"Juliana—my child," said Lady Saxondale, at length slowly rising from her seat, and approaching her daughter with a look so dismal, so dreary, so woe-begone that Juliana, who was not devoid of some generous feelings, was suddenly smitten with compassion for her unhappy parent,—"my child, what has been done cannot be undone; but in the name of God! persevere not in a course which must end in dishonour and disgrace. O heavens! I tremble to think of the consequences!"

"Now, mother, listen," said Juliana. "I really do not seek to wound your feelings unnecessarily: I would not have uttered a word respecting you and William Deveril, had it not been in self-defence—that is to say, to ward off the explosion of your anger against myself. This course, you must understand, was natural enough. To be frank, I love this youth, all menial though he be, with a passionate devotion. I knew that I could not marry him—even as you felt that you could not marry the young artist; and I did as you would have done——"

"Enough! we must say no more upon the subject," interrupted Lady Saxondale, again recovering her cold and unnatural state of composure. "It is too shocking! But henceforth, Juliana, how can we look each other in the face?"

"We must dissemble, my dear mother," responded the young lady, with the assumed gaiety of an effrontery that is combined with a readiness of suggestion. "You cannot be altogether a stranger to the necessity of dissimulation, nor inexperienced in the art thereof, woman of the world as you are: and for my part, I am old enough to manage for myself. Let us go on very quietly, my dear mother,—you pursuing your own course and acting according to your own inclinations, but leaving me free to do the same. Those are the terms upon which we must henceforth live together."

Lady Saxondale was about to say more—perhaps to entreat her daughter to renounce her intrigue with the page and consent to his prompt removal from the house; but if so, a second thought must have told her that Juliana possessed a spirit impatient of dictation, and that at all events at the present moment she was in a mood to assert her independence with the boldest effrontery. Her ladyship accordingly held her peace; and turning abruptly round, quitted the room.

There is no power of language to describe the state of mind in which the unhappy mother found herself now. And well might she be so! All her children seemed not only inclined to rebel against against her, but to use such rebellion as the means of securing impunity for their own vicious courses. Edmund had reduced her to submission and to his own terms, that he might continue in a career of profligacy and extravagance:—Juliana, beyond all doubt fallen from the pedestal of virtue, had likewise used coercion to prevent interference with her licentious amour:—and what hope had the miserable mother that Constance would prove more dutiful or more virtuous? Perhaps even she was already fallen?—for Lady Saxondale was not entirely without her suspicions that her younger daughter still sustained a correspondence with the Marquis of Villebelle. Lady Saxondale dared think no more upon the subject: she endeavoured to escape from thought as one would fling off the coils of a hideous reptile, or flee from the spectres haunting one in a vision:—but the task was difficult indeed!

After having passed a quarter of an hour in her own chamber to compose her feelings as well as she

possibly could, Lady Saxondale recollected her letter to Lord Petersfield, and again descended to the drawing-room. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened, and Frank Paton made his appearance. With the utmost difficulty could Lady Saxondale prevent herself ordering from her presence the youth who was the object of her daughter's love and the cause of her shame. But she saw the necessity of proceeding cautiously in whatsoever she might do; and she bade him take the letter to Lord Petersfield and wait for an answer. Frank bowed and quitted the room: but he felt that while standing before her ladyship, he had looked troubled and confused. And no wonder, when we consider that he was in Juliana's own chamber at the time her mother had knocked at the door.

The young page issued from the house, and took the direction of Portman Square. As he went along he thought to himself that if he had an opportunity of speaking to Lord Petersfield alone, he would again fling himself upon his knees in that nobleman's presence, and beseech him to give him some intelligence concerning that lady whom in his earlier years he had thrice seen, who had caressed him so tenderly, and whom he so confidently believed to be his mother. On reaching Portman Square, he found that Lord Petersfield was at home; and he waited in the hall while a servant took the letter to his lordship. In a few minutes the footman re-appeared, bidding Frank follow him.

"Then I am about to see this nobleman," thought the page to himself, "who I feel convinced knows more concerning me than he has ever chosen to admit. Surely that letter of which I was the bearer, could not regard myself?"

But the youth had no farther time for reflection; for he now found himself upon the threshold of the apartment where Lord Petersfield was seated. He entered—the door closed behind him—and he was now alone with that nobleman.

"Francis Paton," said the cautious and solemn diplomatist, "it may be that you are somewhat surprised at being asked into my presence? I do not say that you are—and I do not wish you to reply without previous reflection. Take time——"

"My lord, I am not altogether surprised," responded the young page; "because I cannot divest myself of the belief that your lordship is the depositor of some secret respecting myself and my sister. And Oh! if it be to tell me anything on that point——"

"You must not speak so rapidly," interrupted Lord Petersfield, with even a degree of sternness: but almost immediately wearing a milder aspect, he said, "Neither must you assume any such opinion as that which you have so rashly, so precipitately, and I may even say so unadvisedly put forward. Young man, I wish to know——but do not answer hurriedly—I never like taking people unawares—— I wish to know, I say, whether you are so well contented with your present position that you would be unwilling to change it? But understand me thoroughly. I mean, suppose that I could procure you a better one. But let me explain what I mean by the word *better* in this sense; because there never should be any mistake as to the real application of terms. Better signifies —— ahem —— it signifies better: that is to say, better in point of standing and better in point of salary You received a good education—I think I am justified in presuming that you are clever: but mind, I do not wish you to answer in the affirmative without having well considered the question whether you *are* clever or not. I may however add that if *sufficiently* clever, I think I can venture so far as to promise you a clerkship in a government office——"

At this moment the footman returned to the room, to announce that the Duke of Harcourt had just called and desired an interview with his lordship.

The cautious diplomatist looked exceedingly grave, and appeared to reflect whether it were possible that the Duke could have any sinister motive in view: but at length coming to the conclusion that such a result was not to be apprehended, inasmuch as his Grace was an ultra-Tory and therefore entertaining the same opinions as himself, he resolved to see the Duke at once. Bidding Francis Paton await his return, Lord Petersfield issued slowly and gravely from the room.

On thus finding himself alone, Frank listlessly—or we might say mechanically—began to turn over the leaves of one of the books which lay upon the table. The volume which he had thus happened to light upon, was of large folio size, handsomely bound, but with the binding very much faded and the leaves themselves the least thing dingy with the influence of time. The front page showed that it had been published in the year 1829, consequently about fifteen years back: it was entitled *Beauties of the Court*, and consisted merely of a number of portraits of ladies, with no descriptive letter-press whatsoever. In short, it was one of those luxuriously got up pictorial works issued to fill the publisher's pocket by gratifying the vanity of ladies in the aristocratic circles, and therefore only fitted to lie upon a drawing-room table.

The young page's thoughts were far away from this volume the leaves of which he was turning over: but still as Lord Petersfield continued absent, he went on looking at plate after plate—and as the engravings were most superbly executed and formed specimens of the very highest style of the art, it was no wonder if Frank, who possessed a refined taste notwithstanding his menial position, proceeded with the inspection.

He had turned over upwards of a dozen pages, and had contemplated the countenances of the most beauteous peeresses and the loveliest daughters of the aristocracy, when he suddenly lighted upon one which caused him to start suddenly as if galvanized with a powerful electric force, while an ejaculation of mingled wonderment and joy burst from his lips. Then, quick as lightning, did his eye glance to the foot of the plate to learn the name of her whose well-known and beauteous features were represented there: but indescribable was his disappointment on beholding naught save this inscription——"A PORTRAIT."

A portrait! yes indeed; and one which he had not failed to recognise:—but a portrait of whom? Hurriedly did he turn over leaf after leaf of that book in the hope of discovering some descriptive letter-press: but there was none. He looked to the index to see whether it should happen to mention the original of that portrait: but it did not. The pang of disappointment was however mitigated by the pleasure of contemplating that transcend-

A PORTRAIT.

ingly beauteous countenance, of which his memory had since his boyhood retained so faithful an impress: for the reader will not have forgotten those words which the young page had so feelingly addressed to the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield.

"Even," he had said, "if I had never seen that lady but once—and even if it were only on the first occasion when I was but six years old—her image would have remained indelibly impressed upon my mind. But recollect, Miss Farefield, that on two subsequent occasions did I behold that lady at about a year's interval each time, and that on the last occasion I was eight years old. At this age the mind is callous and insensible to many things, but equally susceptible and sensitive in other things. Amidst the Alpine forests there is a tree which if, when a tender sapling, a name be engraved upon it, will, as it grows with the progress of years, retain the inscription thus made; and while increasing in bulk and height, it still preserves the name indented upon its rind—and the larger it becomes, the deeper, the wider, and the more palpable grows the inscription also. So it is with certain images which are engraven upon the youthful heart. The human sapling grows up to man's estate, and time, instead of obliterating the inscription, deepens it, makes it spread over a wider space of the heart, and allows it not to be effaced."

But let us pause for a moment to describe this portrait in the volume of illustrations on which Frank Paton's eyes were so intently rivetted. The lady had a countenance of a perfect oval shape, with a forehead of noble height; and the beautiful face was framed as it were with a cloud of raven tresses which showered upon her shoulders and upon her back. A single white rose adorned that hair of luxuriant magnificence. Her brows were darkly pencilled, but yet with delicacy—that is to say, not with thickness: her eyes were dark, and seemed full of lustre even in the print. The nose was nearly straight, with a scarcely perceptible elevation in the classic outline; the mouth was small, the under lip appearing slightly full, but not pouting and very far from coarse. The expression of her countenance was pleasing and affable, but mingled with the conscious dignity of rank—perhaps also of being the cynosure of admiration. She was dressed in evening costume, the low-bodied dress revealing shoulders splendidly sloped and allowing a slight glimpse of a fine bust. Her arms appeared to be well rounded even to robustness, but perfectly symmetrical; and the portrait altogether gave the impression of a fine handsomely-made woman, the voluptuousness of her shape being subdued into gracefulness and elegance. The engraving was surrounded by a tasteful border of tendrils and leaves, and was decidedly the most beautiful specimen of the art in that volume. We should add that the lady who served as the original of this portrait, must have been about thirty years of age at the time the likeness was taken,—which, judging from the title-page of the book, was in the year 1829.

"It was in 1834 that I last saw her whom I believe to be my mother," thought Frank within himself, as his eyes remained rivetted upon the picture. "Then, according to the best of the conception which at that age I could form, she appeared to me about five or six-and-thirty. Yes—she did look some few years older than in this portrait—but not many; and considering the dates," he added referring to the title-page to mark the year again, "it is undoubtedly the same. Oh! not for an instant can I be mistaken. And she was a beauty of the Court? Here is the confirmation of another idea which I entertained, that she *was* connected with the Court. But wherefore is her name not given in this book? Oh! if thou art, as I believe thee to be, the reflex of my mother's countenance, let me kiss thee here, as I have embraced the original!"

And bending down, the youthful page pressed his lips upon the cold inanimate portrait, and a tear-drop fell from his eyes thereon. At this moment he heard footsteps approaching the door; and hastily raising his head, he passed his handkerchief across his eyes. Lord Petersfield re-entered the room; and at once perceiving the open book, he rushed to the table in a manner totally at variance with the usual gravity of his movements.

"My lord, that portrait," exclaimed Francis Paton, "is one which I immediately recognized. Tell me, my lord—tell me, I conjure you—was not this lady my mother?"

"Young man, I—I—am not accustomed to have such home-thrust questions put to me. But wherefore should you address such a question to me at all?" asked the nobleman, who in a moment had regained his wonted composure and self-possession. "How long will you cherish this delusion that I am in any way connected with you or your private affairs?"

"My lord, you must excuse me for saying that I can believe my own eyes. You see that my memory is good—that I at once recognised this portrait. It is ten years since you took me to the school at Southampton, and I was not then too young to have your lordship's image impressed upon my mind, nor is the date so remote that in the interval your lordship has changed to a degree to defy recognition."

"Nevertheless you are mistaken," rejoined Petersfield, with mingled coldness and compassion,—a coldness of tone and yet a certain sympathy in the look. "Now let us return to the subject where upon we were talking before I left the room. I presume that you have had leisure to reflect upon my proposition? But don't answer too hurriedly—take time—never commit yourself: the most terrible calamities have arisen to men and to nations from hasty and unreflected speech."

"I thank your lordship," answered the youth, with even a kind of petulance, "but I cannot devote my thoughts to mere worldly matters now. All my ideas are centred in this portrait. Will your lordship make me a present of the book? I know that the request is a very bold one; but under circumstances I hope your lordship will excuse it. No matter, however, if you cling, my lord, to the book—I will hasten and purchase a copy."

Thus speaking, Frank Paton again glanced to the title-page, and took note of the publisher's name and address. Lord Petersfield for an instant looked annoyed; but the next moment resuming that diplomatic gravity which served him as a mask, he said, "A government situation of about a hundred and fifty pounds a year is something that no youth of your age and in your position should refuse to accept. That is to say," he added, as if

afraid of being caught in the act of recommending precipitation for once in his life, "having duly considered its eligibility. I do not think that I transgress the bounds of propriety and prudence—certainly not those of the truth—when I state that I experience some degree of interest in you, and will endeavour to help you on in the world."

"My lord, at this present moment," returned Frank, "I can decide upon nothing. It is clear that you will give me no information upon the point most vitally interesting to myself; and therefore I need intrude on your lordship no longer."

Then, without waiting to ask if there were any letter or message to take back to Lady Saxondale,—without even recollecting upon what errand he had come,—the young page hurried from the room, rapidly descended the stairs, and issuing from the house, continued his way with the same precipitation towards the street indicated on the title-page of the book as that where its publisher resided. Oh! to possess the portrait of her whom he believed to be his mother and whose image his mind treasured up,—*that* would at least be a mitigation of the sorrow he too often experienced when pondering upon the mystery that enveloped his parentage!

The street was not above half-an-hour's walk from Portman Square for a person proceeding leisurely and deliberately: but Frank, who ran the whole way, accomplished the distance in half the time; and so breathless was he on entering the shop, that he could not immediately give utterance to the words that trembled on the tip of his tongue. At length he stated what he required.

"I have not a copy of that book left," replied the publisher. "In fact the whole impression was subscribed for before issued; and I do not think that if you were to offer a hundred guineas you could procure a single copy. They all found their way into the hands of persons by no means likely to part with them."

Here was a disappointment. But suddenly an idea struck the youth,—an idea which in the hurry and excitement of his rapid run had not occurred to him before. The publisher most likely knew who was the original of the engraving simply described as "A Portrait;" and in vehement haste did Frank put the question.

"You seem, young man," said the bookseller, "to be strangely excited. Is it for yourself, or for the family in whose service you are, that you want the book?"

"No matter," replied Frank. "Do pray answer my question—who was the original of the picture described as *A Portrait?*"

"Well, I do recollect that there was one so described; and I believe it was simply because the lady herself had not enough vanity to wish her name to be paraded. But I can't for the life of me recollect who she was. I entrusted the getting-up of the book to the eminent engraver who undertook the plates; and he borrowed the original pictures from the ladies themselves to make his designs from them. I left it all in his hands, and do not recollect anything more about that portrait you speak of."

"But the engraver—where does he live?"

"He is dead," replied the bookseller.

"Dead!" echoed Frank, smitten with the despondency of renewed disappointment. "There seems to be a fatality about this. Have you not a single copy even for your own private use?"

"I am confident I have not," replied the publisher. "It was but the other day I was regretting to my wife that we had not saved one for ourselves—but such is the fact, I can assure you."

Francis lingered to ask a few more questions in the hope of discovering some means of gratifying his wishes: but nothing favourable transpired. He accordingly issued from the shop with a slowness of pace very different from the excitement with which he had entered it. He was bending his way mournfully homeward, pondering upon all that had taken place and inwardly wishing that he had torn out the portrait from the book ere Lord Petersfield returned to the room,—when he suddenly heard a female voice exclaim, "Frank! Good God, is it possible? Yes—it is—it is—he is alive!"

That voice, even before the young page raised his eyes, touched a chord which vibrated to the depths of his heart; and glancing up, he beheld his sister.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

It was in the middle of a somewhat secluded street that this sudden and most unexpected encounter took place: but had it been in the middle of Regent Street or any other of the most crowded thoroughfares of London, the brother and sister would have thrown themselves into each other's arms as they did then and there. The few passers-by at the time were naturally struck by beholding a very well-dressed lady of exceedingly handsome appearance (for such the sister was) thus suddenly fold a livery-page in her arms: but the ejaculations which escaped their lips, explained the close kinship existing between them.

"Oh, my long-lost sister!" cried Frank in the wilderment of his wild joy.

"Dearest, dearest brother!" exclaimed the lady in accents of gushing enthusiasm: "it is indeed you—and you are alive! Thank God, thank God!"

Full evident indeed was it that both for the moment forgot that it was the open street and the broad daylight of a summer afternoon that they thus met. Expressions of sympathy were uttered around them by those who had paused to witness this affecting scene; and a shopkeeper standing on the threshold of his establishment, in face of which the occurrence took place, considerately stepped forward and with much kindness of manner invited the brother and sister to walk into his house. They at once accepted the proposition; and the worthy tradesman, having conducted them up-stairs, to a neatly furnished apartment, left them there.

The brother and sister being thus alone, and free from observation, embraced again and again; and when the first excitement of feelings attendant upon this meeting was over, they naturally began to ask each other a thousand questions, so that neither for the first few moments could give any replies. It was a perfect torrent of tender and affectionate queries—but no answers.

"My dear Frank," said his sister, at length laughing at the confusion into which the very ecstacy of their emotion plunged them, "we shall

never get on at this rate. You must answer me first. Whose livery do you wear?"—and her looks became suddenly disdainful as she spoke: not disdainful of her brother—for *him* she caressed fondly at the same time; but disdainful in respect to that garb of servitude.

"I am at Lady Saxondale's," he replied.

"Lady Saxondale's!" she echoed, with something like a sudden start, and even a changing of the colour on her truly handsome countenance.

"Yes. Do you know her?" cried Frank, perceiving those evidences of emotion.

"No: but the name is familiar to me," returned his sister. "Dear Frank, I am so rejoiced—so ineffably rejoiced to see you—you know not how much!"

"And now tell me, dear Elizabeth," quickly resumed Frank, "why for the last four or five years you have not written to me? why have I never heard from you?"

"Why, my dear brother?" she exclaimed, now becoming red with indignation, and her eyes flashing fire. "Oh, why?——because I was given to understand that you were dead. Ah! my dear brother, you know not how bitterly, bitterly I wept for your supposed loss! It was treachery of the foulest description: but I can fathom it all—yes, all! Heaven be thanked that you are alive! I could scarcely believe my eyes when they fell upon you—and yet I knew you in an instant!"

"But you spoke of treachery, dear sister," said Frank, in astonishment. "Who behaved threacherously? What is it that you can fathom?"

"The story is much too long to tell you now, dear boy," she replied, speaking with a sort of maternal air at the moment: for, as the reader has been informed, she was nearly eight years older than her brother. "Besides, I am now somewhat pressed for time, and must hasten elsewhere. To-morrow, my dear Frank, you shall come to me: and *that*," she added emphatically, "shall be the last time you wear this badge of servitude. Tell me, dearest Frank, have you been happy? But I am afraid to ask the question: for when I met you just now, you seemed to be absorbed in profound and melancholy thought."

"I cannot say, dear sister, that I have been altogether happy. I have been much troubled by your unaccountable silence: but that source of grief is now, thank heaven, removed. Oh! I am so delighted to behold you again, and to see by your appearance that your circumstances must be good. But tell me, dear Elizabeth, have you obtained any clue to——"

"The reading of past mysteries?" said his sister, anticipating the question. "No—not the slightest. And you, Frank?"

"Upon that subject I was pondering when your voice—your dear voice, so quickly recognized—fell upon my ear."

"Had anything new occurred to plunge you thus into such deep abstraction?"

"Oh, yes! I will tell you. You remember," continued Frank, "that when I joined you at the school at Southampton—that was upwards of ten years ago—I told you how I had been taken to a strange-looking red brick building, where I saw that lady again, and where a nobleman with a star upon his breast spoke to Mrs. Burnaby? Well, I have since found out that the red brick building was St. James's Palace."

"Ah!" ejaculated Elizabeth: "was it so? Then she whom we believe to be our mother, was connected with the Court?"

"Listen," resumed Frank. "You recollect that the same nobleman with a star upon his breast was the one who took me to see that lady at the beautiful country-house the last time I ever did see her—and he then conducted me to the school at Southampton. You remember I told you all this, Elizabeth?"

"Certainly. How could I forget it? But go on, dear Frank—go on."

"Well, that nobleman is, I am convinced, Lord Petersfield—although his lordship denies it."

Frank then proceeded to acquaint his sister with the rest of those particulars which are known to the reader,—how he was so mysteriously provided with the situation of a page at Buckingham Palace—how he had there recognized the two ladies whom he had formerly seen in company with the one whom he believed to be his mother, but how they had denied any knowledge of him. Then he described how he had accosted Lord Petersfield at the palace—how his lordship had likewise denied all the antecedent circumstances—and how through his lordship's aid Frank had obtained the situation at Saxondale House after his summary though not ignominious dismissal from the palace. Finally, Francis Paton told his sister all those particulars relative to the portrait in the *Court Beauties* which have just been described.

"It is of the highest importance to procure that portrait," said Elizabeth, who had listened with the deepest attention and most absorbing interest to her brother's narrative. "It will be certain to afford us a clue to the discovery who the lady was; and if once we ascertain that point, we may follow up the investigation so as to arrive at the truth whether we indeed have any right to regard her as our parent. You say that the publisher gave you no hope of obtaining a copy, and that Lord Petersfield showed no inclination to give you his own? Well, we shall see? You will come to me to-morrow, Frank: and perhaps I may be enabled to show you the portrait then. Oh! my dear boy, you need not look so surprised: depend upon it I will do my best to obtain one. And now I repeat, you must come to me to-morrow. Let it be in the afternoon—and with or without Lady Saxondale's permission, it matters not; for you shall return to her no more. But now I am going to astonish you somewhat. When you come to me to-morrow, you will find yourself in the home of your childhood——"

"What! is it possible?" cried Frank. "I am indeed amazed, but still more rejoiced. How happened it?"

"Simply that the cottage was to let and I took it some time back. But perhaps you have never seen it since you quitted it when eight years old?"

"I had altogether forgotten where it was: but it will give me unspeakable pleasure to behold it again to-morrow."

His sister now gave him her card; and as he glanced upon it, he cried with a new outburst of astonishment, "Then you are married, dear Elizabeth! And your husband?"

"I am separated from him. But look not so suddenly grave, dear Frank: it was through no fault of mine. However, we have not time to converse any longer now. We must separate. Embrace me, dear brother. I shall long for to-morrow afternoon to come, that we may be re-united."

They kissed each other affectionately, and then took their departure—but not before they had expressed their thanks to the worthy tradesman who had so kindly and considerately invited them into his house.

The reader will have observed that Frank Paton said nothing to his sister about his amour with Juliana Farefield. In the first place it was not a subject on which a mere youth, still timid and bashful from no very large experience of the world, was likely to touch upon in the presence of an elder sister: and secondly, even if in confidential ingenuousness he had been so disposed, there was not time in the hurry of discourse and excitement of feelings attendant upon that first encounter after a separation of six long years. While however he was returning home to Saxondale House, the image of Juliana Farefield crept into his mind; and though on the one hand he was rejoiced at the prospect of thenceforth living with his sister, who by her appearance seemed to be in very comfortable circumstances,—yet on the other hand he experienced a saddening sensation at the idea of being separated from Lady Saxondale's daughter. For he loved Juliana with an enthusiastic devotion,—loved her not only for her splendid beauty, but likewise with a feeling of gratitude that she should have learnt to love him, a humble page! He loved her too, because she had recognized in him a gentility above his social position—had delicately complimented him on his intellectual acquirements—and had done all she could to make him feel that he ought not to be humble, and obscure, and menial as he was. He therefore felt that by this love of her's he had been in some sense elevated from his lowly station; and as her impassioned endearments had been lavished upon him precisely as if he were her equal in all respects, he experienced a degree of devotion towards her which now rendered it painful to contemplate a separation.

While thus giving way to his reflections, Frank Paton reached Saxondale House; and then for the first time he bethought himself that he had not asked Lord Petersfield if he had any letter or message to send back. Not knowing exactly what answer to give her ladyship if questioned on the subject, Frank thought that the best plan would be not to signify his return at all: but scarcely had he made up his mind to this course, when one of the footmen told him that her ladyship's instructions were that the instant he returned he was to go up to her.

Frank accordingly ascended to the drawing-room, where her ladyship was seated; and he could not help thinking, by the earnest manner in which she fixed her eyes upon him, that she suspected a secret understanding had subsisted between himself and Juliana. For not actually knowing what had occurred after he had left Juliana's room, he had no precise information on the subject—nothing beyond mere conjecture and apprehension.

"Have you brought back any letter or message?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"None, my lady," responded Frank.

"Then what has made you so long? Surely his lordship could not have detained you all this time?"

"His lordship detained me a considerable time, please your ladyship, as the Duke of Harcourt called in Portman Square while I was waiting."

"But you have been nearly three hours absent," continued Lady Saxondale, regarding her watch. "Surely the Duke of Harcourt did not pay a visit of such length as to account for so much time. I suppose that Lord Petersfield himself kept you in conversation. Indeed, I know that his lordship is somewhat interested in you, on account of your orphan condition and your extreme youth. What did his lordship say?"—and Lady Saxondale put the question point blank.

"His lordship," returned Frank, "kindly stated that he would procure me a Government situation?"

"And of course you agreed to accept it? Why do you hesitate to answer me? You surely cannot be so blind to your own interests as to refuse such an eligible offer? Besides, a proposal coming from a great nobleman like Lord Petersfield, amounts to a command; and such a command is to be obeyed by one in your position. Still you remain silent? What is the meaning of this? If you have not given his lordship a decisive answer, you should do so at once."

"Please your ladyship," said Frank, at length breaking silence, "there is some one whom I must consult before I can pledge myself to a particular course. But I hope that I shall not be thought ungrateful for any intended kindness on his lordship's part, because I act deliberately."

"And pray whom must you consult?" asked Lady Saxondale, for the moment struck with the idea that he was thinking of Juliana; and the crimson glow of indignation rushed to her cheeks at the bare thought that he was thus hardy enough to allude to the young lady in her own mother's presence.

"Please your ladyship," answered Frank, "I have this day met my sister, whom I had not seen for a long time——"

"Your sister?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I did not know that you had any relations."

"Yes, my lady: I have a sister—and I met her just now. To tell the truth, it was because I remained conversing with her that I have been so long absent. She wishes me to leave your ladyship's service and go to her to-morrow, as she is herself comfortably off."

"And pray who is your sister?" asked Lady Saxondale.

"Here is her card," replied Frank, "with her name and address:"—and anticipating not the slightest harm in producing it, he handed the card to his mistress.

Lady Saxondale took it: but the instant her eyes fell upon it, she gave vent to an ejaculation of astonishment, and her look became indescribably strange, with a blending of malignant mockery, scorn, contempt, and triumph. Frank felt frightened, and knew not what to think.

"And this person—this woman," said Lady Saxondale, with accents of bitter irony as she pointed to the card, "is your sister?"

"She is, my lady," responded the young page, fixing his fine large hazel eyes upon his mistress in a terrified manner.

"Then listen, Francis Paton," continued Lady Saxondale, now speaking in a low deep voice and with a look that was nearly inscrutable. "This woman whom you claim as your sister—to whom you are to return to-morrow—and whom you must consult ere accepting his lordship's proffer, is a female highwayman!"

Frank gave vent to a wild cry—almost amounting to a shriek—as this crushing announcement met his ears: but the next instant rejecting with horror the possibility of belief in such an allegation, he said angrily and proudly, "Your ladyship is mistaken: it cannot be!"

At this moment the door was thrown open, and the footman announced Mr. Marlow. Thereupon Frank was about to withdraw; but Lady Saxondale beckoned him to remain: then turning quickly to the lawyer, she said, "I think I am not mistaken, Mr. Marlow, in my belief that the female whose name and address are upon this card, is the same who, disguised in man's apparel, stopped you and Mr. Malton?"

"The very same!" ejaculated the volatile lawyer, as he half snatched the card from Lady Saxondale's hand. "Mrs. Chandos, to be sure! She is a most extraordinary woman—possesses the effrontery of old Nick himself—regularly beat me at Dover. I can't conceive how it was done! that's a mystery I would give a thousand pounds to have cleared up. Did your ladyship ever happen to read the examination at the Town Hall at Dover? It never got into the London papers, but was reported at full length in the *Dover Chronicle*. I cut the slip out—and here it is."

While thus rattling on in his usual style, Mr. Marlow took out his pocket-book—turned over a quantity of papers—and selecting the slip he alluded to, was handing it to Lady Saxondale, when Frank, with a sort of cry of rage and despair, darted forward, snatched it from the astounded attorney, and hurrying to the farther extremity of the room, greedily and anxiously ran his eyes over the printed report. It gave, with singular minuteness and accuracy, such a description of the Mrs. Chandos therein mentioned, that the young page could not possibly fail to recognize his sister. His cheeks became the colour of marble—his lips grew white and quivering—and overpowered with anguish, he sank upon a seat. But still he read on. Then rapidly did a change take place in him—the colour came back to his countenance, with even the deepening glow of exultation—his eyes sparkled—and the whole expression of his truly handsome countenance was that of an enthusiastic joy.

"You see, sir," he exclaimed, suddenly starting from the chair, "that this Mrs. Chandos, whom you caused to be arrested at Dover, triumphantly refuted your allegation, proved that you were wrong, and was honourably dismissed by the Mayor."

Meanwhile Lady Saxondale had in a hurried whisper explained to Mr. Marlow that the young page was none other than a brother of the female highwayman,—which explanation was indeed necessary to account for that extraordinary conduct of a livery-page who had thus dared, with so much excitement, to snatch up a paper which was being handed to his mistress.

"Ah!" said Mr. Marlow, "it looks all very fine in the report—and certainly the case *was* mysterious enough. But when I tell you that—though I have really no means of proving it after all that took place at Dover—I am as firmly convinced of the identity——But I do not wish to hurt your feelings, young man: indeed I am sorry for you. For notwithstanding the rudeness you have just shown—which excitement was however perhaps natural enough under the circumstances—I have always taken you for a nice and well-behaved lad."

The expression of joy and exultation gradually faded away from Frank's countenance, and was succeeded by a look of painful bewilderment. The lawyer was so positive that the poor youth knew not what to think. He longed to vindicate his sister's good fame by flinging the lie at the attorney: but some secret feeling, vague and undefinable, withheld him.

"Now listen, Francis Paton," said Lady Saxondale, assuming an air and a voice of mingled compassion and seriousness. "Your own good sense must tell you that I cannot any longer keep beneath my roof a young man of such deplorable connexions: but at the same time I feel all the injustice of visiting upon you the misdeeds of your sister. You must leave: but the reason need not be known. I will not expose you: your secret shall not pass my lips—and I will answer for Mr. Marlow. But the condition of such forbearance is that you take your hat and quit the house at once, without pausing to communicate with a single soul. You must not even so much as ascend to your own room to change your garments or fetch your clothes. All that belongs to you shall be sent by the carrier to your sister's house to-morrow; and as for that suit of my livery which you have on, you need not trouble yourself about it. Now, do you understand me? and do you promise obedience to these conditions? Otherwise you will force me to expose you before the entire household."

The poor youth was overwhelmed with mingled consternation and bewilderment, as Lady Saxondale addressed him in these terms. Her look and her manner gave to the whole affair a portentous magnitude but too well calculated to produce such an astounding effect upon the unhappy Frank Paton. His senses seemed to be lost in the crushing influence that thus came upon him like a spell. For a moment he sought to raise his voice to vindicate his sister: but the words he would have uttered, died upon his lips. He felt as if he were standing at the bar of a tribunal competent to judge, and that its doom must be regarded as damnatory of his sister's reputation as well as fearful in its effect upon himself.

"Her ladyship," said Mr. Marlow, "has really no other course to adopt: and you would do well, young man," he added in a compassionating tone, "to follow her suggestions at once."

Frank dared not disobey: the spell which was upon him was stronger than himself; and the dread of the threatened exposure sat upon his soul with a stupendous horror. Throwing one dismal dreary look of despair upon Lady Saxondale and Mr. Marlow, he slowly dragged himself from the room.

In the landing outside he met Juliana Farefield.

"Dear Frank," she said, in a low quick whisper, as she caught him by the hand, "what in heaven's name has taken place?"

But the unhappy youth, not daring to tell the object of his heart's devotion—the proud patrician Juliana—what *had* transpired, flung upon her a glance of ineffable anguish; and murmuring, "No, no!" broke abruptly from her and rushed down stairs.

Seizing his hat, which he had left in the hall, he quitted the house, and wandered rapidly away without noticing the direction he was taking and without any settled purpose in view.

Juliana remained transfixed with astonishment upon the landing. Her first feeling was one of rage and indignation against her youthful lover, who she thought had perhaps been either persuaded or bought over by her mother to break off all future connexion with her: but as she recovered the power of calmer reflection, Juliana's shrewd and experienced mind told her that this was not the case There had been too much anguish in the look which Francis had flung upon her—too bitter a lamentation in the accents of his voice as he murmured those words when breaking away from her—and too evident a despair in that frantic movement itself, to warrant the belief that he had yielded to either persuasion or gold in consenting to renounce her.

"These are some devilish arts of my mother," said Juliana to herself: and she at once proceeded into the drawing-room. But perceiving Mr. Marlow there, she instantaneously composed her countenance; and saying, "I beg your pardon: I did not know that you were engaged;" she abruptly quitted the apartment again.

Lady Saxondale immediately came out after her, having requested Mr. Marlow to excuse her for a moment: and catching Juliana by the arm, she drew her into another room, saying, "You evidently wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, mother—I do," responded the elder daughter, a strange and sinister light burning in her dark eyes, and an equally ominous expression appearing upon her countenance.

"I will not pretend to be ignorant of what is uppermost in your thoughts," said Lady Saxondale, having carefully closed the door. "You must have seen Francis Paton quit the drawing-room in despair: you know perhaps that he has left the house for ever."

"Ah! he has left the house for ever?" repeated Juliana, with a singularly cold and resolute air. "Then I also shall quit the house for ever:"—and she moved towards the door.

"Do so," said Lady Saxondale, assuming a demeanour and a tone as glacial as her daughter's. "But you will perhaps do well to hear first why it is that Francis Paton has quitted the house."

"You need not tell me why," answered Juliana, turning round and stopping to confront her mother. "I have learnt more of your character and more of your disposition within the last week or two, than during whole years I had learnt before; and one of my experiences is that if you have a purpose to gain, you are unscrupulous in the means you employ to reach it. Without precisely knowing what you have said or done to Francis Paton, I am at no loss to conceive that your diabolic ingenuity has invented something to banish him from the house. Perhaps you have worked upon his fears——"

"And perhaps," interrupted Lady Saxondale, still coldly as before, "the circumstances of his own position have furnished but too just an opportunity for such a course. Listen, Juliana. Francis Paton has this afternoon met his sister——"

"Well, I knew that he had a sister whom he had not seen nor heard of for four or five years."

"It may be so—or it may not," resumed Lady Saxondale. "But certain it is that this sister is none other than the female highwayman who stopped Marlow and Malton—the famous Mrs. Chandos of the Dover adventure which you yourself have laughed at so heartily when bantering the attorneys at being so egregiously outwitted."

Juliana became pale as death, and even staggered visibly at this announcement: but making a desperate effort to recover herself, and clutching at a straw of hope, she said in a hoarse voice, "This, mother, is some specious trickery of your's."

"No, Juliana, the facts are against such a belief on your part, or such a proceeding on mine. The boy produced his sister's card—and here it is. Behold the name of Mrs. Chandos! See also the address in the corner; it is the same place to which the lawyers were conducted by the female highwayman in the first instance, and whence she escaped by the window. Then Marlow gave the boy this report from a provincial paper to read; and it was clear that he recognized but too well the description of his sister. If you still doubt me, go into the drawing-room and ask Marlow himself."

Juliana saw no necessity for doing this: it was but too evident that her mother was retailing facts and had the game in her own hand. Still she felt the haughtiest disinclination to be beaten, and accordingly said, "The sister may be a bad woman: but Frank himself is untainted by her evil courses."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, with an ironical smile and a contemptuous toss of her head; "if you like to acknowledge the brother of a highwaywoman as your lover, be it so. I cannot restrain you. Our compact is not to interfere with each other: but you cannot certainly be so unreasonable as to expect I should keep the near relative of that female desperado a moment longer beneath this roof. Why, we should not be safe," continued Lady Saxondale, with an affectation of horror which, by appearing to include poor Frank in its apprehension, made every word she uttered a dagger to plunge deep down into Juliana's heart. "Who knows what influence this dreadful woman—this highway-robber—this prowling thief—this midnight bandit of feminine sex but masculine raiment,—who knows, I ask, what influence she might sooner or later obtain over him, even to be able to persuade him, if he remained beneath our roof, to admit herself and the gang with whom she is no doubt connected, into the house by night? We might all of us be murdered in our beds——"

"Enough, mother!" said Juliana, in a voice which, as well as her look, showed the utter abasement of a proud spirit. "You have succeeded in turning this strange discovery to your own purposes; you have triumphed over me for the present. But my turn may perhaps come."

"Your turn, Juliana?—what do you mean?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, pretending to be aston-

ished at the implied threat. "What rancour can you possibly entertain against me on account of this most untoward discovery?"

"Because, mother," replied the daughter, the words hissing between her set teeth as if they came from the tongue of a serpent,—"because, mother, you are gloating over my discomfiture! Yes—in your secret soul—beneath that air of ingenuous wonderment which you have just put on—you exult in the sense of despair and shame which I now experience. But beware, mother—beware, I repeat ——it may some day be my turn to exult and to triumph!"

With these words Juliana Farefield quitted the room; and Lady Saxondale muttered to herself, "Ah! you may threaten, proud spirit! but in the meantime I *have* triumphed: for I have succeeded in creating an eternal barrier between *you* and your plebeian lover! Little do I understand your haughty character if I may not comfort myself with the conviction that you will *not* seek after him again."

With this exultation inspiring her thoughts, Lady Saxondale returned into the drawing-room to transact her business with Mr. Marlow.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE DIPLOMATIST MYSTIFIED.

THE reader is now perfectly aware that Frank Paton's sister was none other than Lady Bess; and therefore we need endeavour to sustain no further secrecy on that head. After parting from her brother in the manner already described, she hesitated for a few moments whether she should proceed on some business which she had in hand at the time she met him—or whether she should carry into effect a project which had just been suggested by certain things she had heard from Frank's lips. She decided on the latter course, and repaired accordingly to Lord Petersfield's residence in Portman Square. To her satisfaction she learnt that his lordship was at home; and on being asked by the footman who opened the door what name he should announce, she replied that being a total stranger to his lordship it was needless to mention any name at all. The footman hesitated for a moment, well aware that his cautious and suspicious master would not be over well pleased to receive a person refusing to give a name: but looking a second time at the visitress, and observing that she was a well-dressed lady, of handsome, elegant, and almost fashionable appearance, he resolved to run the risk, and requested her to walk in.

Lady Bess was conducted up-stairs to the apartment where his lordship was at the time; and he rose from the chair in which he was seated at the table. He looked grave and serious—more solemn indeed than usual: for he had not failed to observe the omission in respect to the announcement of the lady's name. He however bowed with a sort of reserved politeness, and indicated a chair.

"I believe," said Lady Bess, as she took the seat, "that I have the honour of addressing Lord Petersfield?"

"I——I do not know——that is, I cannot exactly say," responded the wary diplomatist, fearful of compromising himself by an unguarded answer. "To tell you the truth, I am not accustomed to have such exceeding home-questions put to me all in a moment—and by a lady who, pardon my saying so, has not as yet announced her own name."

"At all events, I take it for granted," Lady Bess immediately observed, "that I *am* addressing Lord Petersfield. Perhaps I may experience a little confusion on finding myself in the presence of one who has conducted the diplomatic affairs of this country with so much success at the principal European Courts on several occasions:"—and as she spoke, she bestowed her sweetest smile upon the old peer, as it intent upon making an impression on his heart.

"Really, ma'am," said Lord Petersfield, who had hitherto remained standing, but now slowly deposited himself back again in his arm-chair, "I know not how to receive these compliments—whether indeed I ought to receive them at all——or it receiving them, how to answer them——and if answering them, to what result our discourse may lead. Pardon me, ma'am—but you have forgotten to mention your name——"

"Your lordship *must* suffer yourself to be flattered," Lady Bess hastened to observe, affecting not to have noticed his last remark: "because any one who has rendered his country such great services, merits the gratitude o every individual."

"I think, ma'am," said his lordship, now looking so grave that it was utterly impossible to look graver, "that a lady who understands the merits of a cautious diplomacy as you certainly appear to do, should commence by stating at the very outset the name and business——"

"I know," interrupted Lady Bess, "that I ought to apologize for thus intruding myself upon your lordship; but so convinced was I of your lordship's urbanity, courtesy, and I might almost say chivalrous gallantry, that I felt a greater degree of confidence in calling on your lordship than under other circumstances I should have done."

"But, ma'am," interrupted the nobleman, getting bewildered—and it began to occur to him that his own ideas must be rather foggy at the moment, as he could not for the life of him discern amidst the cloud of his visitress's words what she could possibly be aiming at: "but, ma'am—ma'am——I——I——"

"You do well to interrupt me, my lord," said Lady Bess, hastening to speak again; "because I feel that my own intellect is so shallow in comparison with your lordship's, that I have possibly wandered from the subject——"

"Wandered from it, ma'am?" exclaimed Petersfield, a little impatiently; "I do not know that you have yet been near it. Pardon me if I observe, ma'am——"

"Some years ago I was in Paris," interrupted Lady Bess, starting off again at another tangent,—"and I can assure you, my dear Lord Petersfield, that your name was quite revered in all the highest circles of Parisian society. Whenever a comparison was to be made with a great diplomatist, it was invariably the name of Lord Petersfield, which was quoted for the illustration. Therefore, my lord, such being the fact—and I being here to tell it to you—and your lordship being there to listen to it——"

"Really ma'am, I must again beg your pardon,"

interrupted the nobleman, now beginning to fancy that it was a mad lady who had obtained access to him;—and if there were one thing more than another which his lordship dreaded, it was a lunatic —so that his countenance gradually assumed an expression of dismay: but still he went on to observe, "You must pardon me, ma'am, if I again remind you that I am still unacquainted with——"

"Perfectly true, my dear Lord Petersfield," ejaculated Lady Bess: "you *are* unacquainted with all those who spoke so highly of you in Paris. But considering the state of affairs at home, and looking at the condition of continental politics—thence carrying the range of our vision as far as the oriental climes, not even excluding China——"

"Ma'am, ma'am—I really must beg——But perhaps," exclaimed Lord Petersfield, now positively worked up to a state of excitement most rare and unusual with his cautious and wary character,—"perhaps it would be better if you were to explain your business to her ladyship. Lady Petersfield is at home——"

"That is the very thing that I *do* wish, and that I have already stated three distinct times to your lordship," interrupted Lady Bess, with an air of astonishment that he should only have this moment comprehended her meaning and her object.

"Oh, if that's the case," said Lord Petersfield, somewhat relieved, but more inclined than ever to think that his own ideas must have been hitherto somewhat foggy and opaque, "I will fetch her ladyship to you at once. Pray pardon me for leaving you for a few moments:"—but turning when he reached the door, Lord Petersfield made one more effort to elicit the name of his visitress by saying, "I beg pardon—who did you tell me I was to have the honour of stating to have called to see Lady Petersfield?"

"The question is most natural, my lord," answered Lady Bess; "and on your lordship's return—when your lordship shall have returned—and in so returning shall be accompanied by her ladyship—whom on your return I shall be so happy to see——"

"Oh, very well!" ejaculated Petersfield: and despairing of evoking the answer he required, he quitted the room in a degree of haste totally at variance with his usual sedate pomposity, and wondering whether Lady Petersfield would be able to make anything more out of this singular visitress than he had done.

But the instant the door had closed behind him, Lady Bess sprang from her chair and opened a book which lay upon the table, and on the gilt lettering on the back of which her eyes had ere now settled. For a moment she glanced down the index: then observing the particular page she required, she turned to that page—and the ejaculation of, "Yes, it is she! Frank was right!" fell from her lips.

For but a moment did her look linger on the handsome countenance of that portrait: and then she tore the leaf from the book. Hastily rolling it up into the smallest convenient compass, she secured it about her person; and closing the book, resumed her seat. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened, and Lady Petersfield entered, followed by her husband.

Her ladyship was a tall, thin, thread-paper looking woman, with a hatchet countenance, a vinegar aspect, and altogether a mien as unprepossessing as it was possible to conceive. She was stiff and prim: a poker was litheness in comparison. With a very evil eye indeed did she fix her looks upon Lady Bess, whom, from the few words his lordship had spoken to her ladyship while conducting her thither, she was prepared to regard either as a mad woman or an impostress. But Lady Bess, nothing abashed, affected to gaze upon her ladyship with mingled surprise and disappointment: and then turning to the nobleman, she said, "Is this Lady Petersfield?"

"I——I really cannot answer so point-blank a question," stammered his lordship, taken very much aback. "It may be Lady Petersfield: but——but ——I should be sorry to answer rashly or precipitately——I cannot compromise myself in so grave and serious a matter——"

"Well, but in any case this is assuredly not the lady whom I expected to meet," said Lady Bess. "Not but that her ladyship is a very agreeable-looking lady—still she is not the same——"

"And pray whom did you expect to meet, then?" asked Lady Petersfield, with a look which if shed upon vinegar would double its sourness.

"I see that there is some mistake," answered Lady Bess. "I sincerely apologise for the trouble I have given. I must have erred as to the name mentioned me by the lady whom I met at a mutual friend's in the country some time ago, and who pressed me to call upon her when I came to London. Really and truly, I am grieved at the trouble I have occasioned."

With these words Lady Bess made a graceful curtsey and issued from the room, leaving the nobleman and his wife nailed to where they stood, and not knowing what to think of this extraordinary proceeding.

"Petersfield," said her ladyship, "what is the meaning of this?"

"My dear, I——I am not sure even that I *am* Petersfield," stammered her husband: "for my thoughts were never so confounded before. I should not like to compromise myself by any rash opinion. I cannot make it out. It may be——it is possible to be some trick of the Whig party——some base device of the enemy——"

"Some base device of the fiddlestick," cried Lady Petersfield. "The woman was mad—quite mad and I really do begin to suspect that you have had some share in her madness. Ah, my lord! I am afraid you have been a gay deceiver:"—and she looked daggers at her husband.

"I—Lady Petersfield——a what did you say?" asked the diplomatist in utter consternation: "a gay deceiver? I——I——am dismayed!"

But leaving the nobleman and his wife to settle the little dispute which had grown out of the visit of Lady Bess, we must follow the latter away from Portman Square. Right merrily did she chuckle over the success of her enterprise; and when she found herself in a cab, which she stopped and entered, she indulged in a long and hearty laugh at the way in which she had mystified the diplomatist. She now repaired to the place to which she was bound at the moment she met her brother. The cabman had received his instructions; and the vehicle soon stopped at the door of an office in Saville Row, Regent Street. But as Lady Bess looked at her watch and observed that it was so late as six o'clock in the evening, she said to herself, "It is hardly worth while to alight—for he is sure to be gone. But still it will be as well to inquire."

She accordingly descended from the vehicle and entered the house, the front door of which stood open. Passing through folding-doors of green baize, she proceeded along the passage, and knocked at a door on which was painted the word *Private*. A man's voice from within bade her walk in, which she did. The room that she thus entered was a lawyer's private office; and the attorney himself was seated at a desk therein. He was an old man—very short and very thin—with a cadaverous countenance, sharp angular features, and hair as white as snow. There was something sinister and disagreeable in his look; and every line and lineament of his face denoted that love of gold constituted the ruling passion of the individual.

Immediately recognizing Lady Bess, he rose from his seat—bowed with profound respect—placed a chair for her accommodation—and did not resume his own until she had taken it. Altogether his bearing and manner indicated the deference shown towards one of superior rank.

"I scarcely hoped to find you here at this hour, Mr Robson," said the visitress.

"As your ladyship is aware," answered the attorney, "I usually leave at five o'clock: but business of some little importance has detained me until now."

"Ah! you are making money as fast as ever, I suppose," said Lady Bess, with a smile; and yet at the same time there was something like contempt or scorn in her looks as she threw them for a moment upon the old man. "Nothing like money, Mr Robson—is there?"

"Well, even though your ladyship should be

speaking facetiously," replied the lawyer, rubbing his hands in the self-gratulatory style of one who possesses the pleasing consciousness of being well off, "your ladyship has given utterance to a solemn truth, and I presume that your ladyship has called for your own money now?"

"Exactly so, Mr. Robson. It is but a pittance—and yet it is as well to receive it. Have you the receipt ready drawn up for me to sign?"

"Here it is, my lady," was the reply. "I expected your ladyship yesterday or to-day, and prepared it accordingly. But let me look out the money."

Thereupon Mr. Robson opened a drawer in his desk, took out a number of bank-notes, and counted down sufficient to make up a hundred pounds. Lady Bess did not take the trouble to satisfy herself that the sum was correct; but crumpling up all the bank-notes together, she thrust them into her pocket—and then taking the pen which the old lawyer obsequiously handed her, she signed the receipt. But the name which she appended there was not *Chandos:* it had a title of nobility connected with it—a proud and a lofty title according to the estimation of those who value such nominal appendages and aristocratic distinctions.

This little business being transacted, Lady Bess quitted the office, accompanied however by the old attorney, who obsequiously persisted in escorting her to the cab; and though it was but a hired street-vehicle which she entered, he made her as profound a bow when it drove away as if it had been a private-carriage emblazoned with armorial bearings.

Lady Bess now drove home to her own pretty little cottage in the neighbourhood of Edmonton; and dismissing the cab, she entered the elegantly furnished parlour which has already been described in an earlier chapter of our narrative. Rosa, her faithful servant, followed her mistress into the room; and in anticipation of the question which Lady Bess was about to put, she said, "He seems to be much better. The doctor has been and declares his opinion that in a few days he will be convalescent."

"But has he become more lucid?" asked Lady Bess: "does his reason seem to be regaining its balance?"

"I think so," answered Rosa: "for I have been sitting up with the old nurse for some hours while you were out, and he asked several questions which appeared rational enough: but they were only put singly and at long intervals, and the answers did not seem to suggest other questions."

"What questions did he ask?" inquired Lady Bess.

"He asked where he was; and when I told him beneath a friendly roof, he only closed his eyes and looked just as if he was lost in thought: but whether he has the power to think so much at all, I cannot say. After a while he asked who the kind and handsome lady was that came in to see him three or four times a day; and when I told him that it was Mrs. Chandos, the same who had dressed herself in man's clothes to help in delivering him, a smile played for a moment upon his countenance, and he then again fell into that mood of seeming abstraction. Do you know, ma'am, that the more one looks at him, the more one is inclined to think that if he were well and rational, and had not that strange look, he would be handsome? He has got good features—his eyes are fine, but spoilt by that vacant regard which they possess. His teeth are remarkably good——"

"Well, well, Rosa," interrupted Lady Bess, laughing, "if you like to fall in love with him, you may. Is the old nurse attentive?"

"Very," answered Rosa; "and what is better still, she is not impertinently curious. So long as she has her beer and her brandy with due regularity, as well as her five or six meals a-day, I do not think that she will ask many questions."

"But the doctor—did he endeavour to ascertain from you any particulars concerning the patient?" demanded Lady Bess.

"Yes: but I told him that he was a cousin of your's, whom you had not seen for a long time—— in short, I said all that was necessary to satisfy the doctor, and likewise to prevent him from thinking it odd that you should have a young man in your house."

"That was considerate on your part, Rosa," responded Lady Bess: "for although you know that I am tolerably indifferent in most respects about the opinion of the world, yet there is one point on which I am rather scrupulous."

"Well, my dear mistress," rejoined Rosa, laughing, "whatever may be said of you after you are dead and gone, it is very certain that scandal must leave your reputation as a woman alone. It's really quite astonishing to me that such a beautiful, handsome, fine-looking creature as you are —— pray excuse me for saying all this——"

"Indeed I shall not excuse you at all," interrupted Lady Bess, laughing: "for you know that I dislike this kind of flattery—or if being too indifferent to dislike it, I certainly think that you might talk upon another subject."

She put off her bonnet and shawl, and bade Rosa, who was going to carry the things up-stairs, see whether the patient was awake; as if so, Lady Bess would pay him a visit so soon as she had partaken of some refreshments which were already spread upon the table. Rosa returned in a few minutes with the information that he was wide awake, and was conversing with the nurse more lucidly and continuously than he yet had done. Accordingly, so soon as Lady Bess had finished her repast, she ascended to the bed-chamber where the invalid lay.

CHAPTER L.

THE INVALID.

THE individual of whom we are speaking was the pale-faced stranger whom Lady Bess had rescued from captivity at Beech-Tree Lodge. On separating from her companions on the night alluded to—having hastily divided with them the fruits of their expedition—Lady Bess had brought that mysterious individual home to her cottage: but so great was the excitement which this restoration to liberty produced, that scarcely had he crossed the threshold of the hospitable abode when he fell down in a fit and was conveyed to bed dangerously ill. Medical assistance was at once summoned from Tottenham—

composing draughts were given—and Lady Bess with Rosa sat up by his bedside for the remainder of that night. In the morning a nurse was engaged to attend upon the invalid; and thus everything was done to minister to his comfort, tranquillize his mind, and ensure his recovery. The third day since his rescue was now drawing to a close, and his progress towards convalescence was satisfactory.

On ascending to the sick-chamber after having partaken of refreshments, as above described, Lady Bess found that the patient was indeed much improved: and the instant she entered the room, an expression of joy and gratitude brightened upon his pale countenance, as he exclaimed, "Oh! my kind friend—my benefactress—I am glad you are come to me again!"

Lady Bess took his emaciated hand and shook it cordially: but he, retaining her's, pressed it to his lips with the warmth of his grateful feelings—and then tears trickled down his wan haggard cheeks as his head lay supported upon the pillows.

"You feel better?" said Lady Bess, sitting down in a chair by the bedside.

"Much better—Oh! so much better," answered the invalid. "And I am better *here* too," he added, placing his hand upon his forehead. "There are many things that I wish to say to you," he continued, thus appearing to proffer of his own accord those explanations concerning himself that Lady Bess so much longed to hear. "I have a great deal upon my mind and shall feel relieved when I have told you everything."

"And I," responded Lady Bess, "shall be rejoiced to become your confidante. If you feel well enough now to speak at any length——"

"Yes—I feel well enough," he answered. "But where is that sweet interesting creature who was also at the house yonder—Beech-Tree Lodge—you know whom I mean? Did she not leave it with us?"—and he again pressed his hand to his brow, but this time as if to steady his ideas and collect his reminiscences.

"Yes—she left the house with us," returned Lady Bess. "Her name is Henrietta Leyden. But perhaps you knew something about her?"

"No—nothing. Henrietta! what a pretty name!" and he repeated it three or four times over in a way that showed that there was still a certain degree of childishness characterizing his mind. "Where is she? does she live here? I should like to see her again. But you, my dear friend, are not angry because I say this? No; I am sure you are not. You cannot be: you are too good to be angry."

"Angry? no, certainly not!" replied Lady Bess, with an encouraging smile. "Henrietta Leyden does not live here; she left us the other night, when we issued from Beech-Tree Lodge, to return to her own home. But she will come to see us—I feel assured she will. She was much interested in you."

"Ah, sweet Henrietta! pretty Henrietta!" said the invalid: and in a listless vacant manner did he go on repeating these words in a low murmuring tone.

Lady Bess began to fear that after all he would not be in a condition to give her any explanations at present; but suddenly raising his eyes towards her countenance with a return of their lucid expression, he said, "Now let us talk."

Lady Bess made a sign to the old nurse, who accordingly quitted the room; and she remained alone with the invalid.

"I do not know," he resumed, speaking slowly and deliberately, with the air of one who is afraid of throwing his thoughts into confusion by pursuing their thread with too much precipitation,—"I do not know that I shall be able to make you comprehend all I wish to say: for sometimes when it seems to me that I am catching a recollection of the past, it escapes from me, and then a cloud settles upon my mind and I see nothing clearly for some time. But let me try. I know that when I was a child I had a very sweet, pretty, and kind mother; and often and often has her image risen up so plainly and perfectly before me that I recognized it in an instant. She was Lady Everton——"

"Ah! I thought so," muttered Lady Bess to herself. "I felt assured it would be thus!"

"My father," he continued, "was Lord Everton ——not the vile wicked man who has kept me so long a prisoner at Beech-Tree Lodge—but his elder brother: and I suppose that it is because my father died long ago that my cruel uncle has become Lord Everton. And yet I do not know how this could be; because when I was a boy I was always made to understand that I should one day be Lord Everton. But I suppose it is that my cruel uncle shut me up and kept me captive that the world might think me dead, and he might be Lord Everton instead of me, and grasp all the riches that ought to be mine."

"That is the explanation of your uncle's wickedness," answered Lady Bess. "He did not dare kill you outright, and therefore he kept you shut up at Beech-Tree Lodge. But you shall be Lord Everton yet, in spite of him. Indeed you are Lord Everton now; and he is only an infamous usurper."

"Oh, my dear kind benefactress—my good Mrs. Chandos—my excellent friend!" exclaimed the invalid: "what joyful things you are telling me!"—and again seizing her hand, he conveyed it to his lips.

"Do not excite yourself, my good friend," said Lady Bess. "All that I promise you I will perform: but we shall have to proceed cautiously—and perhaps it will not be the work of a single day to establish your claims and prove your identity. But go on. Do you know how old you are?"

"I remember very well that my birthday used to be kept on the 8th of June——and stop——I remember too I was told that I was born in 1816——yes, I am sure of it."

"Then you are twenty-eight," said Lady Bess; "and that is about the age that I conjectured. Can you remember how long you have been at Beech-Tree Lodge?"

"Stay, and I will reflect," said the invalid, again pressing his hand to his brow: then after a pause, he said, "I know that I was twelve when I was told that my father was coming home from India after a long, long absence; and it was just at the same time that I was one night put into a carriage by Lord Everton, Bellamy, and Theodore Barclay, and taken off to Beech-Tree Lodge. There I have remained ever since."

"Sixteen years of captivity," said Lady Bess. "Poor young man, this is sad indeed! But where were you at the time when you were snatched away in that manner?"

"Oh! it was at Everton Park, where I used to live with my mother. It was a beautiful place—such a fine large house, and such numbers of servants! There were carriages, and horses, and everything in grand style. Oh! it was a dreadful change to be taken and shut up in that vile place from which you delivered me!"

"But," said Lady Bess, "it surely was not with your mother's consent that you were thus taken away?"

"God forbid that I should think so: for my poor mother seemed to love me dearly. I do not think she was happy—I often saw her cry, particularly when my cruel uncle called at the Park. They used to talk together in whispers; and he must have said very harsh things to her, for I recollect that it was always then she cried most and seemed so unhappy. No—I cannot believe that she let me be carried off in that manner. It was in the middle of the night when it happened; and though I cried very much and thought that my uncle was going to do me some harm, he would not let me see my mother before I was hurried away."

"And you say that your father was in India at the time and was coming home? Do you not recollect your father?"

"Not in the least. He went out to India soon after I was born. I know that he was a great General as well as a Lord, and went to India to command the armies there."

"And from the moment that you were taken to Beech-Tree Lodge sixteen years ago, you never saw your mother?" asked Lady Bess.

"Never," was the reply. "I used to cry very much for her, and asked Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin to take me to her: but they always told me to hold my tongue—and they even threatened to kill me if I ever spoke about her to any of the servants of Beech-Tree Lodge. Ah! I have been very, very miserable at the Lodge, all by myself in a room with iron bars at the windows, and the door constantly locked. I used to think that I should go mad; and sometimes it appeared to me as if I awoke from a very long dream, scarcely able to recollect what I had been thinking of. Indeed," he added slowly and with a deep seriousness of countenance, "I do think that there were intervals when I forgot all that was happening—where I was—everything connected with the past——in short, I am afraid that there were times when I was really mad."

"Do not think of those bad times any longer," said Lady Bess in a soothing tone. "No doubt your captivity has done you a great deal of harm: but you will get well soon, and be happy and comfortable again—because no unkindness will be shown to you here, and I will not allow any one to come to take you away. Indeed; your cruel uncle does not know where you are at present; and if he be searching for you, his search will assuredly be in vain. Of course you know that your father is dead?"

"Yes—because Mr. Bellamy and Mrs. Martin were both talking of it one day when they had me out in the garden walking with them. That was soon after I was taken to Beech-Tree Lodge. They did not think that I was listening at the time; but I overheard what they said, and asked them about it. I cried very much; for I had hoped that when my father came back to England, he would take me away from Beech-Tree Lodge and punish my cruel uncle for keeping me there. I used to be told at Everton Park that when my father came back from the East Indies he would be so glad to see his Adolphus——"

"Then your Christian name is Adolphus?" said Lady Bess.

"Yes: I was named after my father—his name was Adolphus also. But do you think that Henrietta will come to see us?" asked the invalid, his ideas suddenly changing with feverish eccentricity into another channel. "I must tell you something about her. I used to think to myself latterly when I was at Beech-Tree Lodge, that if I could only manage to open the door of my room, I should be able to escape and get back to my poor mother. So I used to pass hours in examining the lock: but I could not open it. At last one day, when I was taken down to walk in the garden with that man Bellamy—a cruel, wicked man—I saw a rusty key lying on one of the borders. I picked it up unseen by him, and kept it. Several times did I try to open my chamber-door with it: I found that it turned in the lock—but still the door kept shut—and then I recollected that it was bolted on the outside. But one night—it must have been in the middle of the night, when I could not sleep—I thought to myself that if by any accident the person who had been last with me had not bolted the door I might get out. And sure enough, when I unlocked the door with my rusty key, it did open. I stole out of the room and descended the stairs all in the dark. I had to feel my way along the wall of the passage to reach the next staircase; and in so doing, my hand encountered something that seemed to be a knob in the wall. I don't know how it was, but by just touching that knob, a door seemed to open suddenly. I was at first very much frightened; but when I saw the moonlight shining in through a window facing the open door, I thought that this would perhaps be some avenue of escape. I stole in, and found myself in a bedroom. The curtains were closed at the foot of the bed; and I stood wondering whether anybody was in that couch. Perhaps it was my cruel uncle—perhaps it was Bellamy—perhaps it was Mrs. Martin? I was much frightened, and stood still listening to ascertain if I could hear any one breathe. I did—and it was the breathing of some person who was evidently asleep. Still I remained quiet, not knowing what to do: then the breathing ceased—and feeling great curiosity, I peeped through the curtains at the foot of the bed. By the light of the moon and stars I saw such a beautiful face upon the pillow: the eyes were looking at me—and I at once perceived that I was causing a terrible affright. I heard the sweet creature moan with a sort of horror; and much terrified myself, lest she should alarm the house, I retreated rapidly—shut the door behind me—and ran back to my own chamber. There I locked myself in again; and I do not know what more I thought of that night."

"I suppose that the occupant of the chamber you had thus entered was Henrietta?" said Lady Bess.

"Wait and you shall hear," resumed Adolphus, now appearing to have more command over his thoughts and recollections than he had hitherto pos-

sessed. "I think it must have been the next night that I tried my door again—again found that it had not been bolted on the outside—and again did I steal forth. I thought that I would go and see that sweet pretty creature in her chamber: for I know not how it was, but I entertained an idea that she was a prisoner like myself. I was much interested in her; and I thought that if she were a prisoner I would help her to escape with me. I felt along the wall of the passage for the metal knob—found it—and opened the door leading into her chamber. There was a candle burning in the room; and that beautiful creature, with her clothes on, was reclining in a large arm-chair. She was asleep—and I stood still to gaze upon her. I thought that I had never seen any one so beautiful: I longed to go and kiss her as she slept: there was such a sweetness in her countenance—so different to the disagreeable look of that horrid Mrs. Martin. She began to awake: and I knew not then what to do. I grew frightened; but mustering up my courage, I advanced towards her, determined to speak. I raised my hand to make a sign to her to be silent and not to be afraid: but she suddenly seemed to faint—and I was so confused and bewildered that I turned away, shut the door, and again hurried back to my own chamber. I did not think of any farther attempt at escape that night. Even if I had found the means, I do not think that I should have fled to leave that poor girl behind me. The next day, from the window of my chamber I saw her walking with that odious Mrs. Martin in the garden at the back of the house. How different was this sweet creature from the vile woman she was with! I thought to myself that if they would allow me to have that interesting being to come and sit with me a little and talk to me, I should not so much mind living at Beech-Tree Lodge. But no, no—I knew they would not: they never did anything to soothe me in my captivity—and so wretched was I at times, that I used to cry out aloud, even in the deep silence of the night, in the bitterness of my anguish."

"Do not think of that any more, Adolphus," said Lady Bess, as soothingly as if she were speaking to a child: "it will only make you unhappy. Have you told me all your adventures with the rusty key of your own chamber and the secret door of Henrietta's? for I am quite sure that you are speaking of her."

"Oh! I have a great deal more to tell you. We nearly succeeded in escaping together once; and I must explain to you how it was. Another night—I think it must have been the next—I again stole forth from my chamber, descended the stairs, and crept along the passage. But how frightened was I when I saw that secret door open and a light streaming out! I stopped to listen. Oh! that cruel uncle of mine was with Henrietta, threatening her—ill-treating her. I rushed in and dashed him to the ground. Then I seized Henrietta's arm and hurried her from the room. Oh, to escape! But no—we were not to escape *then*. Somehow or another the household had been alarmed, so that Bellamy and Mrs. Martin with some of the servants caught us. The monster Bellamy struck me down; and when I came to myself, I was no longer an occupant of the chamber which for so many years had been mine, but found that I had been removed up to that loft where you afterwards discovered me. That is all."

"And you still experience for Henrietta the same kind feeling—the same sympathy?" said Lady Bess, perfectly well understanding that the unfortunate Adolphus had become deeply smitten with the young damsel's beauty, though he himself did not comprehend the nature of the feeling.

"Yes—Oh, yes—I love her very much, and shall be so glad to see her again:"—and as he thus spoke, his pale haggard countenance became animated with a light reflecting the emotions of the heart.

"Depend upon it you will see Henrietta again," answered Lady Bess. "But have you not wearied yourself by so much talking?"

"Yes, a little: and yet I feel relieved by having told you all these things. I thought when I began that I should have had much more to tell you; but as I went on, a great deal of what I had been thinking of slipped out of my mind. Perhaps I shall remember more to-morrow; and you may rest assured that I will tell you everything."

"Now you would do well to compose yourself to sleep," said Lady Bess.

"If you will not go away. Promise me to remain here by my bedside, and then I shall sleep in peace and comfort."

"I will stay here," was the response of his kind hostess.

Thereupon Adolphus, like a tractable and satisfied child, closed his eyes and was soon asleep.

For some time Lady Bess sat thinking upon all he had told her: but gradually her thoughts wandered elsewhere and settled themselves upon the incidents of that day. She reflected with joy upon the meeting with her brother, and the happy discovery thus made that he was not lying cold in the silent grave as she had been treacherously led to suppose: but a gloom gradually settled upon her countenance as she thought to herself, "Oh, if he should discover what I am! But no, no—he must not be suffered to find out *that*. How strange that he should be in the Saxondale family, and it was the young lordling who bears this name that I despoiled a little while back. The lawyers too, connected with the affairs of that family, were those with whom I had that strange and exciting adventure:"—and now the radiance of triumph superseded the gloom upon the amazonian lady's features, as her grand exploit of the ride to Dover came back to her memory.

Again did her thoughts turn into another channel, and settle themselves upon her interview with Lord and Lady Petersfield, which likewise brought a smile to her lips: but suddenly becoming grave and serious, she drew forth the portrait which she had torn from the volume, and unrolling it, fixed her eyes upon the beautiful countenance of the lady represented there.

"Was this indeed my mother?" she said to herself, contemplating those features and endeavouring to trace therein some resemblance to her own. "Methinks there is a faint, faint likeness between this beautiful patrician lady and my dear brother Frank—yes, and also a likeness to myself. And yet it may be but fancy. Assuredly I am not capable of vanity sufficient to induce me to assimilate myself to this lady. And yet I do think there is a likeness to both me and Frank. The pencilling of

the brows resembles those of my brother: there is something too in the look—the expression—the general air, reminding me of him. But with regard to myself——"

"What have you there, my good friend?" asked the invalid, who had just awoke.

"A very pretty picture," responded Lady Bess. "I value it highly, but will let you look at it."

"Oh! I would not wish to keep anything that you value," answered Adolphus with affectionate gratitude towards her who had delivered him from his horrible captivity. "But do let me look at it. You seem to be surveying it with so much intentness, and your lips move as if you were talking to yourself."

Lady Bess handed the portrait to Adolphus: but the instant his eyes fell upon it, an ejaculation of wild joy burst from his lips—his pale countenance became illumined with the lustre of animation—and he cried out, "It is she—it is she—my mother!"

Lady Bess could scarcely believe her ears, and for a few moments she lost the faculty of speech in the wildering surprise which seized upon her. But as she still regarded the invalid with earnest attention, she saw that he continued to contemplate the portrait in a manner which forbade her to believe that the recognized identity was a mere delusion of his brain.

"You say that this is the portrait of your mother?" at length observed Lady Bess,—"the portrait of Lady Everton?"

"Yes, yes: it is the portrait of my mother!" cried Adolphus. "Oh! think you that her image is not sufficiently impressed upon my mind to render me confident of the fact? But you yourself knew it——you kindly and generously procured this portrait for me——O heavens! is my dear mother alive? Tell me, tell me where she is: let me go to her—or do you send for her——"

But Lady Bess made no answer: she was absorbed in the deepest reflection.

"If Lady Everton, then, be my mother and Frank's mother, we are the sister and brother of him who lies here now. But how can this be? No: it is impossible. There must be some strange mistake——some wild error on one side or the other. I know not what to think: I am bewildered. At all events it will be prudent to say naught of my own past history to Adolphus at present. No: for were I to unfold my suspicion that the original of that portrait was the mother of Frank and myself, it would be to proclaim the mother of Adolphus unfaithful to her husband. Yet during that absence in India what may not have taken place?"

"Wherefore are you thus thoughtful? wherefore do you not answer me?" cried Adolphus, whose ideas appeared to be more collected than they even were ere he went to sleep; and the expression of his eyes was more settled, or rather less vacant, while the light of joy was now shining in them.

"I can assure you, my dear friend," replied Lady Bess, "that it was by mere accident I showed you this portrait. I had no earthly conception that you would recognize it. I did not even know who the original was. It was torn from a book containing many portraits of the ladies of the aristocracy. But tell me, my dear Adolphus, do you know whether your mother was connected with the Court?"

"Yes—I remember now—she was often, very often with the Princess Sophia, and used to stay with her Royal Highness for weeks and months together—sometimes at Kew—sometimes at Windsor—sometimes at St. James's Palace. It is strange how my recollections are coming back."

"And no doubt your mother, Adolphus, used to have a great number of ladies staying with her at different times?"

"Yes: but I do not recollect any of their names now. Perhaps I shall presently, or another time?"—and he appeared to strain himself as it were to give a fresh impulse to his memory.

"Does the name of Lord Petersfield happen to be familiar to you?" asked Lady Bess.

"Lord Peterafield?" echoed Adolphus. "Oh, yes—he was a frequent visitor at Everton Park, and I have seen him also at St. James's Palace. I think at the time he occupied a post in the household of the Princess Sophia. I am certain he did. But now my ideas are becoming confused again—a dimness seems to spread itself over my mental vision—things that just now were vivid, are becoming dark——But, O! this portrait—every lineament—every line—even to the very expression of the countenance itself—all are as clear as ever in my brain!"

He ceased speaking, and reclining back upon the pillow whence he had started up in the excitement of his joy on first beholding the portrait, closed his eyes as if to concentrate all his powers of thought inwardly, and thus endeavour to extricate himself by a strong effort from the chaos of confusion into which he was relapsing. Sleep gradually came upon him; and Lady Bess, summoning back the nurse to the chamber, descended to her own elegantly furnished parlour. Just at that moment there was a knock at the door; and Rosa, having answered the summons, informed her mistress that a person named Theodore Barclay desired to speak with her. Lady Bess ordered him to be introduced; and the footman of Beech-Tree Lodge was accordingly shown into the parlour.

CHAPTER LI.

FOLLOWING UP THE CLUE.

THEODORE BARCLAY, who now appeared dressed in plain clothes, was a man about forty years of age, with a countenance that was not ill-looking, but the expression of the features indicating full plainly that he was of a cunning, crafty disposition.

"I received your note, ma'am, at the Hornsey post-office," he said, "and am here accordingly."

Lady Bess desired him to take a seat; and as he did so, he could not help contemplating with mingled curiosity and admiration the heroic lady whom he now beheld in the apparel that suited her sex.

"What has taken place at Beech-Tree Lodge?" she went on to ask. "Have any measures been adopted to search for him whom I rescued the other night?"

"No—none," returned Barclay. "Lord Everton is ill in bed through fright and excitement; and a sort of consternation prevails in the house. No one there seems to know what to think or what to do: but the general belief is that there will be a precious explosion."

"Now tell me candidly," said Lady Bess, looking the man very hard in the face: "do you know who that alleged lunatic whom I rescued from captivity, really is?"

"Well, ma'am, to speak the truth, I do."

"And the other servants?" asked Lady Bess.

"They don't know as positive as I: but they have a very shrewd notion."

"Of course—that he is the late Lord's son—the present Lord's nephew—and therefore by rights the true Lord Everton?"

"That is it, ma'am," responded Barclay. "I may observe that Bellamy and Mrs. Martin used to take care that there was as little communication as possible between the prisoner and the servants generally, myself excepted. But we were all forbidden to gossip, on pain of dismissal; and as we were uncommon handsomely paid, it answered our purpose well enough to hold our tongues."

"But still you must be aware that in the village of Hornsey there are some strange rumours afloat relative to that alleged lunatic? When I determined the other day to effect an entry into the house at night, I went and made inquiries in the neighbourhood concerning the establishment: for indeed, in the first instance, I was altogether unacquainted with every particular regarding it. It was a note which Miss Leyden shot from the window and which accidentally fell into my hand, that made me resolve to espouse her cause; and the preliminary steps were naturally to ascertain as much as I could relative to the house itself and the people in it. I was told in the village that it was a licensed lunatic asylum, but that it was generally supposed there was but one lunatic within the walls, around whom a strange mystery hung, rumour declaring that he was the rightful Lord Everton."

"I myself was often questioned by the people in Hornsey upon the same point," answered Theodore Barclay: "but I used to tell them that these rumours had only got abroad from the fact that the poor lunatic believed himself to be Lord Everton's nephew, and that he had said as much to some of the servants, who whispered the thing about."

"Well, be this as it may," continued Lady Bess: "*you* of course have all along known that the alleged lunatic spoke the truth. How was it that you never thought of helping him to escape in the hope that if he recovered his rights you would be well rewarded?"

"To speak the truth," answered Barclay, "because I saw that the thing was so surrounded with difficulties I might have got myself out of a good situation in running after a shadow. You see, ma'am, the death of Adolphus Everton when twelve years old was generally believed: a funeral took place, and a coffin represented to contain the deceased was buried in the family vault. Moreover, the present Lord Everton slipped as easy and comfortable as possible into the enjoyment of the title and estates; and so, all these things considered, I never thought it worth my while to meddle any farther in the matter."

"Besides which," added Lady Bess significantly, "you had already meddled a little too much, perhaps: for I am no stranger to the part you played in helping to carry him off in the middle of the night. How long ago was that?"

"It was sixteen years ago: so he was quite a boy at the time. I was then three or four-and-twenty—quite a raw young man up from the country—totally inexperienced in life, and anxious only to make money. This I saw I could do in Lord Everton's service."

"And you have doubtless done so. But now, if in any way you can help me in putting this injured young man in possession of his rights, you shall be well and handsomely rewarded."

"To tell the truth," observed Barclay, after a pause, during which he seemed to reflect profoundly, "there *is* something which I might throw a light upon if I chose. I threw out the hint just now——"

"I did not understand it," responded Lady Bess.

"It was when I spoke of the interment affair. I was in *that* business; though as I have just said, quite a raw green chap. But how can you show me that it will be better worth my while to turn right round against the old man than to stick to him?"

"It will be better worth your while," replied Lady Bess, "because it is inevitable that the old man, as you call him, will be stripped of both title and estate, and the young one will be put in possession of them. The old man therefore will be deprived of the means of rewarding those who uselessly adhere to his desperate fortunes; whereas, on the other hand, the young man will shortly be enabled to reward handsomely those who are now instrumental in forwarding his views."

"I understand," observed Theodore Barclay; "and as you, ma'am, seem to have a pretty considerable finger in this pie, it will be to you that I shall trust for a handsome reward."

"Be it so: and now proceed. What have you to tell?"

"If you could only manage to find out a fellow by the name of Bob Shakerly——"

"What! he who was once a resurrection man?" exclaimed Lady Bess: for she had happened to hear the individual spoken of on one of those occasions which had thrown her in contact with the gang frequenting Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town.

"The very same. Is he alive? do you know anything about him?" asked Theodore eagerly.

"I can find out where he is: I know that he is alive—or at least was, a few months ago. But what of him?"

Theodore Barclay bent a very mysterious look upon Lady Bess; and leaning forward, said in an equally mysterious tone of voice, "It was Bob Shakerly, ma'am, the resurrectionist, who supplied a dead body that was passed off as the corpse of the Hon. Master Adolphus, and was buried with all due honours."

"Indeed! this is highly important," exclaimed Lady Bess. "You have given me information of the most vital consequence, and you shall be amply rewarded. But you say that you were mixed up in that business?"

"I helped to convey the dead body into the house at Everton Park. Mr. Everton that then was—the Lord Everton that now is—fetched me up from a little estate he had a good way off down in the country, on purpose to help in that job; and I also was one that assisted to carry off Master Adolphus. So, in plain terms, you see, ma'am, I was too deeply implicated in the whole affair not to be interested in keeping it as quiet as possible."

E.HOOPER

"You were indeed. And now tell me, who is that Mrs. Martin?"

"Once a mistress of Lord Everton—Mr. Everton, as he then was, and Mr. Everton as I expect he is likely to become again. Mrs. Martin has been a terribly profligate woman: she was once a brilliant beauty about town; and I do believe now that her passions are as strong as ever and have entirely outlived her good looks. Ah! ma'am, she is an awful woman, and I do not think would hesitate at any crime. She has a very comfortable berth at Beech-Tree Lodge—plenty of money—good clothes and good food; and therefore she has not hesitated to make herself useful in any way to the old man. As for Bellamy, he is another creature of the same selfish sort; and I suppose he has likewise feathered his nest pretty comfortably."

"Do you know what has become of Lady Everton, the mother of the unfortunate young man who has so long been kept out of his rights?"

"Her ladyship is living in some seclusion, very strict, and a long way off—in Wales, I think—but I really do not know. Concerning her we scarcely ever heard anything at Beech-Tree Lodge. But I do happen to know that she is alive."

"You know *that*? So much the better. I am rejoiced!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "Now you must do all you can to discover where she is. Take this sum of a hundred pounds:"—and she gave him the notes she had that day received from Mr. Robson. "It is merely a trivial earnest of what shall hereafter be dealt out with no niggard hand; and whatever explosion may take place measures shall be adopted to ensure your safety. But I am in hopes that the entire affair can be settled quietly, and without any explosion at all. Of course you will return to Beech-Tree Lodge, and watch well everything that passes, so that you may be enabled to report occasionally to me. But lose no time in discovering Lady Everton's abode, if possible."

"I will do my best," answered Theodore, highly satisfied with the liberality already shown and the promises held forth; and after a little more conversation he took his departure.

It was now dusk; and Lady Bess, finding that Adolphus was sleeping soundly, and conjecturing that after the excitement of his long discourse with her, he would most probably sleep on for a considerable time, resolved to pay a visit to Bob Shakerly at once. She accordingly hastened to array herself in her male costume, substituting the tight-fitting frock, the waistcoat, and the pantaloons, as well as the neat-shaped boots and all the other requisites of the masculine toilet, for the silk dress and *et cetera*s of the female gear. She then mounted her gallant chesnut; and it being now quite dark, rode away in the direction of London. On reaching the district of St. Pancras, she passed into Agar Town; and alighting at Solomon Patch's door, she entered the house. There she heard several persons talking about the double murder in the barge; but none of them attributed the deed to Chiffin. In fact, those who were thus conversing, had not the slightest idea that the Cannibal had been concealed in the barge at all, and consequently their suspicions fell not upon him.

This was the first that Lady Bess had heard of the dreadful deed. During the whole morning she had been at home at her cottage, whither the intelligence had not penetrated either by report or through the medium of the newspaper, of which she was no great reader. Afterwards, when she went into town, her attention had been so much engrossed, as the reader has seen, by other circumstances—the meeting with her brother, the visit to Lord Petersfield, and the call upon Mr. Robson—that she had had no opportunity of even catching the slightest floating whisper of the terrible occurrence. When therefore she now heard these people at the *Billy Goat* speaking of the murder of Tugs the bargeman and his wife, and the death by suffocation of their child, she was instantaneously inspired with a deep and fearful interest; and she flung a quick glance of inquiry at old Solomon, who was serving gin behind the bar.

"Please your ladyship to walk up-stairs for a minute," said the landlord; and he accordingly led the way up into that private room which has been before mentioned.

"Is all this true that I have heard?" asked Lady Bess, with ill-disguised horror.

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Patch, whose attempt thus to reassure and encourage the amazonian heroine was so obsequious that it would have been ludicrous were it not in reference to so dread a subject. "It is indeed too true that Chiffin must have done this, 'cause why he was with 'em at the time."

"Good heavens!" was the subdued ejaculation which came from the lips of Lady Bess; and she literally staggered against the wall, as if stricken with awful remorse at ever having had anything to do with such a miscreant as the Cannibal.

"Deary me, deary me, what is the matter with your ladyship?" asked old Solomon, thinking she was going to faint. "Shall I run and get a drop of brandy, or gin, or rum, or sherry?"

"No, no—be quiet—hold your peace," answered Lady Bess impatiently. "This is truly frightful! Those poor people who sheltered and concealed him! Old man," she continued, in a voice tremulous with emotions, "there are certain degrees of wrong—I may even say of crime, if you will—to which one becomes habituated. Such is my case: but from any blacker turpitude my soul can recoil with as deep a horror as that of the most delicate creature utterly unacquainted with fault or misdeed."

"But your ladyship has always knowed that Chiffin wasn't over particular," answered Solomon Patch; "and that story of his'n about eating human flesh when he was a younker at sea——"

"He never dared tell it in my presence," interrupted Lady Bess. "It is true that it had reached my ears—but I set it down as an idle vaunt made by him when in his cups. Of course I knew that Chiffin was a desperado; but I did *not* know that his hands were embrued with blood. *Now* I believe the tale which hitherto I had regarded as an inflated boast; and I consider him capable of the most satanic deeds. Solomon, were he to enter the room this moment I should recoil from him in horror and aversion. But do not tell him this," she immediately added, shuddering visibly, "if you should see him. I now dread that man—I would not provoke his rancour for worlds——unless indeed he did suddenly appear before me; and *then* I feel convinced that I could not restrain my feelings."

"Don't be afeard, my lady—depend upon it I sha'n't mention a word of what you say when I see Chiffin——That is, if I ever do see him again; for he is very likely to get out of the country."

"I think not: for from what those people said down in the bar, he does not even seem to be suspected. Has there been any pursuit after him?"

"Not that I can learn, please your ladyship," replied Patch. "I do not think the detectives has got on the right scent. But won't your ladyship take summut? You look all pale and no-how."

"No—nothing," she answered petulantly. "You know I never drink."

"Yes, my lady, I know that you have none of them small wices."

She was moving towards the door of the little seedid-looking apartment, when suddenly recollecting the object of her coming, she turned and said, "I had well nigh forgotten why I called. Do you know the whereabouts of a man named Shakerly?"

"What, old Bob Shakerly?" ejaculated Solomon. "To be sure I do. He was once a body-snatcher: now he's a knacker and makes catsmeat and sassages. It's down at Cow Cross, Smithfield. Your ladyship can't mistake: anybody will tell you Bob Shakerly's yard."

"Put up my horse till I return," said Lady Bess. "I do not like to ride him into London:"—and having thus given her orders, she quitted the room, descended the stairs, and issued from the house; but as those who stood at the bar respectfully made way for her, as she was held in the light of something very superior at the low boozing-ken, they could not avoid noticing that she was exceedingly pale.

Emerging from Agar Town, Lady Bess obtained a cab at the nearest stand, and jumping in, ordered the driver to proceed to Cow Cross. During the half-hour which the journey occupied, her whole thoughts were bent upon this diabolical murder of which she had just heard, and which had filled her with so profound a horror. Were her heart analysed at that moment, it might perhaps have been found that a remorse had arisen there for the adoption of that course of life which had thrown her in the way of such human reptiles as Chiffin, and compelled her to make use of them for her purposes.

On reaching the foul neighbourhood of Cow Cross, Lady Bess descended from the cab, bade the driver wait, and proceeded to inquire for one Bob Shakerly. He seemed to be as well known in that vicinity as an alderman in his ward; and she was forthwith directed to a narrow alley at the extremity of which she would find a knacker's yard. Scarcely had she entered the lane, when her nose was saluted by so fetid a stench that she recoiled for a moment from farther encounter with the pestiferous exhalation. It was a horrible smell of corrupt flesh and mouldy bones, mingling with the sickly steam from cauldrons in which the anatomized animals were seething down. None save those who have been so unfortunate as to venture upon the confines of a knacker's yard, can possibly conceive the horrible nausea produced by these blended effluvia: it was enough to make the strongest stomach heave and become sick. It was an odour, indeed, that was not only fetid and sickly, but pungent and penetrating as well,—an odour the pestiferous miasma of which one might expect to take away in one's clothes,—an odour that could not fail to pierce into all the surrounding dwellings, to mingle with the hot atmosphere of rooms where the poor lay huddled together in herd-like masses, or to render more fetid still the feverish air in the chamber of the invalid.

No wonder, then, that Lady Bess recoiled at first from the very approaches to that pandemonium of noxious odours: but the next instant conquering her repugnance when she considered the important object she had in view, she continued her way, literally battling however against the rolling vapours as if they were the billows of a strong tide which she had thus courageously to breast. Dimly through the mephitic exhalations did the lights burn in the wretched houses on either side of this alley; and the shouts of drunken revelry, the cries of quarrelling women, the imprecations of brutal husbands, and the screams of ill-treated wives, blended in horrible discordancy. Altogether, it was a neighbourhood which, existing in the very heart of the capital of civilization, was a disgrace to civilization itself!

Lady Bess passed onward, and reaching the end of the alley, found herself at an open gateway, revealing a full view of a spacious yard surrounded by tumble-down sheds and wooden buildings, from several of which the strong light of fires threw a lurid glow into the open space. All the frontages of these buildings gleamed ghastly in that light with the bleaching bones of animals hung up to dry. A glance into the places where the fires were lighted, showed Lady Bess large cauldrons in which the horse-flesh was boiling; and now that she was so near as to be within reach of the volumes of vapour which rolled away from these cauldrons, the odour became almost stifling in its nauseating intensity. It seemed as if it was an odour that could be felt—that clung around you—adhered to you—stuck to you like a thick and clammy substance—making you feel dirty all over, and long to hasten away to put off and eschew for ever the garments thus impregnated with the feculent effluvium.

Heaped up in the corners of the yard were putrifying masses of the entrails and offals of the slaughtered horses: pools of blood darkened the ground in many places—and ever and anon the foot slipped over some slimy substance, such as clotted gore or rotting pieces of flesh, so that a horrible shudder shot upward through the entire frame and the heart heaved as if rising to the very throat. A cart at one extremity, resting slantwise on its shafts, contained a dead horse that had been recently brought in; and in one of the sheds were four or five living horses, huddled together in a space not more than of sufficient dimensions for one. These poor brutes were starving—yes, literally starving: they were the merest things of skin and bone that ever managed to retain a particle of vitality—and perhaps they were goaded to a keener sense of that last spark of life by the pangs of famine.

Such was the knacker's yard! And this horrible spot, with its nauseating odours, its accumulated filth and feculence, and its instances of hideous cruelty to poor worn-out animals, was only one amongst several replete with kindred abominations in that neighbourhood. There they were, in the midst of one of the most densely populated quarters of London—hotbeds of feculence and corruption, ready to blaze up with gunpowder effect into all the devastating horrors of plague and pestilence. And there, too, they are now at the present day,—preparing a rich

and luscious banquet for the Cholera, whenever that most terrible missionary of Death shall revisit the British capital. Yes—there they are allowed to exist, not only by the bloated, rapacious, and besottedly ignorant Corporation of London, but what is worse still, by the Government which is supposed to exercise a paternal supervision over all the most vital interests of the people.

Into that pandemonium of pestilence was it that Lady Bess thus entered; and making her way,—but not without several pauses to conquer the nausea which seized upon her, and many slips over the slimy substances under foot,—towards a place where three or four men were busy in attending to the cauldrons, she asked for Mr. Shakerly. The men desisted for a few moments from their operations to have a good stare at Lady Bess, whose beautifully shaped figure in its elegant costume was brought out into strong relief by the lurid light of the furnaces. They were at first surprised at seeing such a fashionably-attired young gentleman appear within those precincts: but their wonder was enhanced into amazement as the conviction stole upon them that this handsome and exquisitely dressed young gentleman was indeed a very beautiful and fine-grown lady, the rich contour of whose form could not be altogether concealed by the artifices of the male toilet.

"Well I'm blowed, Bill," said one aside to another, "if this isn't a rum go. *She* don't come to contract for cat's-meat."

"No—or for sassages neether," was the response. "You wants the old un, ma'am——or had I ought to say *sir?*"

"Whichever you like, my good man," answered Lady Bess, "provided you will only tell me if I could see your master:"—for she was most anxious to escape as soon as possible from the intolerable atmosphere of that place.

"Where be the old un?" asked one of the men of his comrades: and then with a stout staff that he held in his huge hands he stirred up the whole seething contents of the cauldron, which sent forth a cloud of the sickliest vapour, so that volume after volume of the pestilential exhalation rolled over the well-nigh stifled Lady Bess.

"I think he be in the sassage-room," replied the man who had just been particularly appealed to: and as he spoke he lifted up in his hands an enormous piece of horseflesh so putrid that it was green all over, and tossed it into the cauldron: then without even so much as wiping his hands down his greasy blood-stained smock, he took out his tobacco box, drew forth a quid, and thrust it into his mouth.

"Will you tell your master that a person wishes to see him? or if you will tell me where I can find him, I shall be obliged?"—and Lady Bess spoke with ill-disguised loathing and disgust, for she could endure the hideous scene no longer.

"He be over yonder," was now the answer which her question received; and the individual who gave it, pointed to a part of the building where but a comparatively faint light was seen through the dingy windows.

Lady Bess hastened to traverse the yard; and as she drew near the place indicated, the sounds of a crazy mechanism in whirring motion met her ears. She opened the door, and found herself on the threshold of a small low room, the atmosphere of which was abominably sickly and fetid, and where a miserably shrivelled old man, with a greasy fur cap on his head and the sleeves of his filthy shirt tucked up to his very shoulders, was superintending the operations of the sausage-machine. On a board fixed against the wall and supported with one leg or prop, was a pile of pieces of meat of the most disgusting description. They certainly were not green with putridity; but they were black with the unwholesome blood and gore clotted upon them. Just at the very moment that Lady Bess opened the door, the old man was taking up in his hands a quantity of these loathsome morsels and tossing them into the receiver of the machine. Lady Bess turned aside, thinking that she must beat a retreat, and abandoning her object, flee away from this horrible place where every sense was offended or outraged.

"Hullo! who's that there?" exclaimed the old man: then as Lady Bess, conquering her repugnance for the tenth time since she had entered the knacker's yard, turned towards him, he raised one of his bloodstained hands to his cap, saying, "Beg pardon, sir, but didn't twig at once that it was a swell cove. My eye!" he suddenly ejaculated, now discerning her sex: "who be you, ma'am? Why, it's that famous Lady Bess I've heerd talked of when I've been once or twice up at old Sol Patch's. Ain't you Lady Bess?"

"I am—and I wish to have some conversation with you."

"At your service, ma'am. Please to shut the door, and we can talk as comfortable here as anywhere else."

"I could not," replied the amazonian lady. "I have no doubt that your avocation is lucrative enough, and that you do not like to be disturbed at it. But I can make it worth your while if you will just wash yourself a bit, put some decent clothes on, and meet me in a quarter of an hour at any public-house in the neighbourhood where we can have a room to ourselves and a bottle of wine."

"Well, that's an offer not to be refused," returned old Shakerly: "pertickler the making it worth my while. So it's a bargain. But I'm sorry you look so disgusted at what I'm doing: it's quite astonishing to me. Now surely there's nothink to make you turn up your pretty nose at that sassage-meat. Them's the primest pieces cut out of a couple of 'osses as fresh as can be. Why, I gives the heart and livers in with 'em, and that's the reason my sassage-meat is in such request. There isn't a slap-bang or small eating-house in London that doesn't send to me for sassage-meat. And I'll tell you a secret too——But answer me first; d'ye ever eat sassage-rolls at the pastry-cooks?"

Lady Bess made a gesture of impatience, and retreated to the threshold of the door.

"Well, if you have you've enjoyed 'em no doubt," continued the old man; "and if you hav'n't you've missed a treat. Let me tell you, Lady Bess, that there's many a fine pastry-cook as sells his sassage-rolls at tuppence or thrippence which is a deuced good customer to me. My meat, mixed up with pork—the proportions generally one to three—gives a rich flavour, and a firmness too which you can't get in pure pork sassages."

"I must really request that you will make your preparations at once," said Lady Bess ineffably disgusted: "for my time is precious."

"Oh, beg pardon!" said Mr. Shakerly. "Just you go to the public-house that I frequents, ax for a private room, order up the wine, and wait till I come. I sha'n't be a quarter of an hour."

Thereupon the old man described the whereabouts of the public-house to which he alluded; and Lady Bess lost no time in vanishing from the knacker's-yard. Right glad was she to escape from the noxious fumes and revolting spectacles of that horrible place. The public-house was speedily found—a private room was placed at her disposal—she did not forget to order the bottle of wine—and in about twenty minutes Bob Shakerly made his appearance. He was now somewhat more cleanly and presentable in person and in apparel: but nevertheless, if he had expended a bottle of some fragrant essence in expelling, or rather deadening the sickly odour that still clung to him despite his ablutions, it would have been all the better. For the effluvium of a knacker's-yard adheres to one like the taint of a crime or with the tenacity of a remorse!

"Now," said Lady Bess, producing her purse and counting down ten sovereigns upon the table, "this money is at your service provided you give me the information I desire."

The old man's eyes glistened like those of a snake at sight of the gold; and evidently eager to clutch it, he asked what information it was that Lady Bess sought.

"About sixteen years ago," she replied, looking at him very hard in the face to convince him that she knew something about the matter and that no denial or evasion would do,—"you were employed by a certain gentleman who since has borne the title of a nobleman, to procure the dead body of some boy and introduce it into a certain house in the country. It is concerning this transaction that I require all the particulars you can give."

"Well and good," returned old Shakerly. "But how am I to know that I mayn't get myself into trouble by telling you all about it?"

"You will get yourself into trouble if you do not," answered Lady Bess. "I have discovered so complete a clue to the unravelling of the whole conspiracy of which the transaction of the dead body forms a part, that I could at once invoke the powers of the law against every one concerned. But my object is to have the matter settled quietly—that is to say, as quietly as possible; and the way to do this is by convincing the guilty originator of the whole vile scheme that it *is* discovered in all its ramifications, and that he would do well to surrender his usurped title and estates in the way less liable to create exposure."

"I understand," said old Bob Shakerly: "frighten his lordship into it—eh? But ten guineas for such information as you want from me, is little enow," added the old man, anxious to drive the best bargain possible.

"Here are twenty," said Lady Bess, producing the remainder of the sum; "and I will make it up to fifty on the day that the true Lord Everton recovers his rights. If you will not take my word for it, I will give it to you in writing: but doubtless those who have already spoken to you of me——"

"Your ladyship need not say any more," interrupted the old knacker. "I am perfectly satisfied:" —then having helped himself to the wine, of which Lady Bess refused to partake, he proceeded to observe, "I suppose your time is precious, and therefore I'll come to the pint at once."

"Do so," said Lady Bess: "for I am anxious to be gone."

"Well then, it was as you have said," resumed the old man, "just about sixteen years ago that a genelman came to my lodgings—I was then living up Pancras way—and said that if I liked to do a certain job for him he'd pay me well. I axed who recommended him, or how he come to find me out: and he told me as how that he'd been making 'quiries in some of the low neighbourhoods of London for a resurrectionist. Of course in making them 'quiries he'd passed hisself off as a surgeon: and so it wasn't thought odd. Well, in this way did it appear that he came to hear of me. He then told me his business—which was that he wanted the dead body of a lad about twelve years old, such and such a height, and with dark hair. I was always a rayther cautious kind of a feller, and didn't like standing a chance of getting into trouble: so not liking this business overmuch, I said as how I must have more explanations. The genelman then goes on for to say that it suited his purpose, for family reasons and what not, to have a certain lad of that wery same age put out of the way; but as he didn't choose to go wery extreme lengths—which of course meant murdering him—his scheme was to have him locked up in a lunacy 'sylum and make the world believe that he was dead. So then I twigged of course that this was some affair of getting hold of an estate or summut of that sort; and seeing that I could reckon on good payment, I agreed. But I represented to the genelman that there was a many difficulties in the way; 'cause why, it wasn't *any* dead body that would suit, but must be one of a certain age, a certain height, and a certain colour hair. The genelman said as how he was aweer of all them difficulties, and was prepared to pay a good price. In short, he offered me a couple of hundred guineas for the job, and gived me twenty guineas as an earnest. He told me that I was to come to him the wery moment I succeeded, and so of course he let me know who he was—the Honourable Mr. Everton—and he had a house somewhere up at the West End of the town, I forget exactly at this moment where it was."

"No matter where," observed Lady Bess. "Proceed with your statement."

"When the genelman had gone," continued old Shakerly, "I remained thinking of the business I had to transact, but couldn't exactly see my way clear at first. At last a thought struck me. It happened at the time that I had a precious bad leg through having tumbled into a grave one night when I was doing a bit of body-snatching work; and it rayther suited me than otherwise to lay up for a week or two and get it cured. So I fancied I might kill two birds with the same stone: I therefore went bang at once into the workus of my own parish, which was Saint Pancras, and got put into the 'firmary. The workuses then wasn't what they are now under the New Poor Law: it was easy enough to get into 'em, and there was always a precious swarm in the 'firmary. So I calkilated to myself that it would be odd indeed if out of such a lot there wouldn't be at least one young feller answering the purpose who'd die in the place;—and sure enough there was just such a lad as the genelman

required—I mean when he became a stiff'un. I slept in the bed next but two to that wery lad—and while he was dying I marked him as my prey——"

"Go on, go on—and spare the details," said Lady Bess, shuddering at this description.

"Well then," continued the old man, after having gulped down another draught of wine, "to make a long story short, the boy did die about ten days after I'd entered the workus. It was a hinternal disease, as they called it; and he made a pretty corpse enow. They didn't keep the bodies long above ground at the workus: so the funeral soon took place. That wery day I discharged myself, although my leg wasn't cured: but that didn't matter—for I thought Mr. Everton's gold would be the best salve for it after all. Well, I lost no time in calling on Mr. Everton and telling him that I should be prepared that night. He told me to bring the body in a cart to the neighbourhood of Everton Park, which is about twenty mile from London, and named a particular spot where I should be met by himself and some others. He gave me such a good description of the place that I couldn't miss it; and so everything was arranged quite comfortable. That wery night, betwixt eleven and twelve o'clock, I had the body out of old St. Pancras, and by two in the morning was at the place of appointment. Mr. Everton with two others met me. One of his companions was a friend of his'n which he called Bellamy: t'other was a country chap that he called Barclay—a sort of servant. Well, betwixt us we conveyed the body into the mansion by a back door, of which Mr. Everton had the keys. We placed it in a bed-room; he then paid me my money, and I took my departure. As I was driving in a leisurely way along the road towards the nearest village—I forget what its name is now—a post-shay and pair dashed past as if going to London; and as it was then close upon day-break, I caught a glimpse of Mr. Everton and Bellamy with a young lad inside the shay, and Barclay was sitting on the box. So I knowed what *that* meant: it was the young heir that was being took off to the lunacy 'sylum. Ah! thought I to myself——"

"No matter what you thought," interrupted Lady Bess: "is that all you have to tell me respecting the transaction of the substitution of the dead pauper for the living heir?"

"That's all," answered old Shakerly.

"Then take your money," immediately rejoined the amazonian lady; "and trust to me to fulfil my promise when the aim now in view is accomplished."

The old knacker did not require to be bidden twice to pick up the gold coins, which he deposited in a greasy purse, or rather canvass bag; and then he emptied the bottle of sherry. Lady Bess bade him good night; and quitting the public-house, she returned to the cab which was waiting for her. It bore her to the immediate vicinage of Agar Town, where she dismissed it; and proceeding to Solomon Patch's, she mounted her horse and rode away in a homeward direction.

It was midnight when Lady Bess reached her cottage; and as she alighted from her horse, the front door was opened hastily. Frank Paton sprang forth: but the instant he recognised his sister in her male apparel, he beheld therein the terrible confirmation of all he had that day heard from the lips of Lady Saxondale and Mr. Marlow—and with one wild cry of anguish and despair, fell down senseless.

CHAPTER LII.

THE OATH PROPOSED.

It was the afternoon, and Constance Farefield sat half-reclining upon a sofa in an apartment at Saxondale House. She was alone: books and musical instruments were scattered around her; and had a stranger entered at the time—or indeed any one unacquainted with the young lady's secret—he would have thought she was beguiling the time by means of those elegant accomplishments which principally pertain to females of her class. Yet it was not altogether so. True, the young lady had been singing, to her own accompaniment on the guitar, one of those sweet airs which her lover the Marquis of Villebelle so delighted to hear poured forth in the delicious harmony of her melodious voice; but when the guitar was laid aside, and although she still listlessly retained the music-book in her hands, her thoughts became entirely concentrated on the image of him who possessed the worship of her heart.

Sweetly beautiful was Constance Farefield; and she possessed a disposition which, if never subjected to the evil influences of fashionable life, and if never warped by the bad example of a mother, as displayed in circumstances already related, would have rendered her a being of signal virtue, propriety, and prudence. But she existed in an atmosphere where virtue is a flower that soon sickens, fades, and withers,—occasionally pining for a time ere it be blighted altogether, but often perishing with the unwholesome heat at once.

On the present occasion Constance Farefield was meditating upon the promise which, as the reader is aware, she had a short time before made to the Marquis of Villebelle,—"that in the world's despite she would love him on unto the end," and that so soon as he had secured the means of guaranteeing an adequate maintenance for them both, she would become his wife—that is to say, she would accompany him to the altar, and go through the mockery of the marriage ceremony: for no sophistry could blind her eyes to the fact that the Marquis was married already. But as she pondered upon this promise which she had given, did she tremble? did she hesitate? did she experience remorse? No: in her own thoughts and in her own resolves the Rubicon was already passed; and she even longed—ardently and fervidly longed—for the coming of the hour that was to give her to the arms of Villebelle.

It is impossible to deny that the young lady's passions were excited and her imagination inflamed by certain things which had come to her knowledge. Was she not aware, from the conversation she had overheard between Mr. Gunthorpe and her mother, that the latter had offered to become the mistress of William Deveril, rather than resign the hope of gratifying the passion which she had conceived for that handsome young man?—and as there were now no secrets between the sisters, had she not heard from Juliana the fact that this young lady

had abandoned herself up to the pleasures of a guilty love with Francis Paton? Yes: nor had Juliana concealed from her the discovery of her amour by Lady Saxondale, and the flight of the young page from the mansion. Thus was it that Constance had the evil examples of a mother and a sister before her eyes; and as she contemplated them, it was natural that her own imagination should be excited. Therefore was it that with the delicacy which had at first characterised the love of Constance Farefield, thoughts and feelings of a grosser contexture imperceptibly and insidiously blended themselves; and she looked forward with impatience for the day that was to make her the Marquis of Villebelle's own.

While thus giving way to her reflections, as she sat half reclining upon the sofa, the door opened, and Lady Saxondale entered the room. Constance blushed for a moment, fearing lest her thoughts should be penetrated by the keen eye of her mother: but instantly recovering her self-possession,—for *she* also was rapidly becoming an adept in hypocrisy,—she made room for Lady Saxondale to sit down by her side. And now she observed that her mother's looks were grave and serious, almost to solemnity; and she rapidly threw a mental retrospection over recent incidents in connexion with herself, to ascertain whether anything could have possibly betrayed her secret meetings and correspondence with the Marquis of Villebelle.

"My dear Constance," said Lady Saxondale, fixing her eyes in a scrutinizing manner upon her, "it is my purpose to leave town almost immediately and pass two or three months at the Castle in Lincolnshire. Of course you will be prepared to accompany me?"

"When do you think of leaving?" asked Constance, for a moment taken aback by this announcement, yet again speedily recovering herself.

"The day after to-morrow," replied Lady Saxondale.

"But is not this resolve somewhat hasty on your part, my dear mamma?" asked Constance.

"It may be so: but I am sick and wearied of London life. The truth is, Constance, I am not happy. I fear that I have cherished rebellious children——"

"Oh, you must not speak thus!" interrupted the young lady, touched by the mournfulness of her mother's tones and looks. "I hope that you do not include me in this sweeping accusation?" Alas, I am well aware that Edmund is not quite so steady as he ought to be——"

"No—very, very far from it!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale: then with exceeding bitterness, she went on to say, "You know not all that I have suffered through his irregularities, his disobedience, his cruelties towards myself——But enough upon that head!" she added with a haughty bridling up. "It is not for me to complain thus of a son to a daughter. Constance,"—and now Lady Saxondale fixed her eyes with a peculiar earnestness upon her youngest child,—"tell me candidly, are you altogether in Juliana's confidence? Ah! that tell-tale blush—that sudden start——"

"Dear mother, what do you mean?" ejaculated Constance, frightened at the change which had suddenly swept over Lady Saxondale's countenance.

"I mean that Juliana is so shameless in her shame that she has not even had the decency, the delicacy, or the consideration to conceal her frailty from you. Do not attempt to deny it, Constance," added Lady Saxondale, impetuously; "I can read your thoughts upon your countenance as plainly as if they were printed in a book."

The young lady made no answer: she looked confused and ashamed—indeed well nigh overwhelmed: and her looks fell beneath those of her mother: for she felt that there was a guiltiness even in being the confidante in her sister's guilt. She felt too that she would not have thus been made a confidante at all, were she not of a kindred spirit, or else having some love-secret of her own; and all these things she naturally perceived at a glance must be fathomed by her mother.

"Now, Constance," said Lady Saxondale, "I wish to have some serious conversation with you. Edmund rebels against me—Juliana flies in my face. Tell me at once, that I may either have something to console me or else know the worst this moment,—tell me, I say, are you still my own good, kind, obedient daughter? or are you prepared to imitate the example of your brother and sister?"

"Oh, my dear mamma!" exclaimed Constance, snatching her mother's hand and carrying it to her lips, while the tears streamed down her face, "do not think too bad of Edmund and Juliana—make allowances for them——"

"It is of yourself, Constance, that I am speaking now. Let there be no evasion. In what light am I to regard you?—as a dutiful or a rebellious child? as one who will minister to your mother's consolation, or help with the rest to break her heart?"

"How can you ask me?" murmured Constance, profoundly touched by Lady Saxondale's words. "Would to heaven that I could see you happy!"

"Then I take this as an assurance that you are my own dutiful Constance still:"—and Lady Saxondale kissed her daughter upon the forehead. "But let me put your filial obedience to the test. Constance," she suddenly exclaimed, "look me in the face! There——like that——and now answer me ——answer me, I say, as if you were replying to your God——answer me, and say whether you yourself are still the pure, chaste, and innocent being which I love to think you are? or whether you also are fallen and disgraced?"

A quick blush suffused itself over the young lady's countenance—but her looks quailed not beneath those of her mother: and she replied, "I take heaven to witness that I am as you love to think me!"

"I believe you, Constance—I believe you," was Lady Saxondale's rapid response. "But now I wish to touch upon another subject. From Juliana's own lips," she continued more slowly, "did I learn that you both overheard a conversation which the other day took place between myself and an impertinent intrusive old vulgarian named Gunthorpe. Was this proper on your part, Constance? was it kind, was it generous, to become an eaves-dropper in respect to the affairs of your own parent? But I will not reproach you for that fault, inasmuch as you have now given me the assurance of duteous and filial obedience. It is done: it cannot be recalled. But let me ask—do you believe the vile calumnies which Mr. Gunthorpe on that occasion thought fit to hurl

against you mother? Ah! I see that Juliana has impressed you with the belief that those accusations are true. But it would grieve me deeply, deeply—it would afflict me more profoundly than I can ever express—to think that I should be regarded in such a light by you, Constance,—you, my youngest child—my best beloved - and the only one who now testifies due respect to your mother!"

"If you tell me, my dear mamma, that everything Mr. Gunthorpe said is false, it will be sufficient. I shall then regard his accusations," added Constance, "as odious calumnies."

"And odious calumnies they are!" rejoined Lady Saxondale, with an emphasis the strength of which was derived from her matchless effrontery. "Now do you believe me?"

"I do," answered Constance: and yet scarcely were the words spoken, when a secret voice appeared to whisper in her soul that her mother was deceiving her.

She accordingly looked with involuntary earnestness upon Lady Saxondale's countenance, and she thought she perceived a look that showed conscious guilt on that mother's part,—a look which was seen as it were behind the mask of cool and prideful effrontery which she wore. This was another lesson that Constance then took in the ways of the world - a lesson teaching her how to look more profoundly than she had ever yet been accustomed to do beneath the surface of the countenance and thus gaze down as it were into the depths of the human heart. It was a lesson showing her all the dark nooks and corners in which conscious guilt hides itself behind the mask of dissimulation,—thus affording her fresh hints and suggestions for the better veiling of her own thoughts and deeds in future. In short, it was a farther reading which Constance now obtained into the hypocrisies whereof the human heart is capable: it was a deeper insight which she acquired into the mysteries of duplicity and deceit. And this is the worst species of enlightenment which a young woman of her age and passions, circumstances and position, could possibly obtain: for what she thus learnt she was likely to practise —and by the discovery of the weak points in others, she would become the better able to throw the gloss of hypocrisy over her own.

Lady Saxondale was too astute and too deeply versed in those mysteries of the heart, not to perceive what was passing in her daughter's mind. She therefore saw that her declaration of innocence with regard to Gunthorpe's accusations was not believed, notwithstanding the assurance that Constance had given her that she did believe it. For a moment she knew not what to say or do: for the whole tenour of this conversation was to lead to a certain aim which she had in view, and unless she succeeded in carrying her daughter's mind along with her as it were, she felt that she, must fail in attaining her object.

"Constance," she suddenly observed, "your lips declare that you believe me while your heart does not echo the averment."

"Why should you think so, dear mother?" asked Constance; and with the assumed innocence of her looks she proved how well she had profited by the new lesson of dissimulation which she had just received.

"Because your countenance showed me that your thoughts belied your words. Constance," added Lady Saxondale, with deep solemnity of tone and manner, "if I swear to you by everything sacred that I am innocent with regard to William Deveril, will you believe me? But stop!" ejaculated her ladyship: and with all the seeming hauteur of conscious truth in what she was about to say, she added, "I have been a widow, Constance, for nineteen years—and never once, as God is my judge, have I sacrificed my honour to living man!"

Constance at once perceived the subtlety of this asseveration. That her mother had remained chaste and pure in body, was possible: but that in soul she had become tainted—in short, that if she had remained virtuous in respect to William Deveril it was not her own fault—the young lady full well comprehended.

"Why, dear mamma – oh, why," she exclaimed, "should you think it necessary to address me in this strain? I believe you—I believe you!" she cried vehemently, in the hope of getting rid of the subject: and the excitement with which she spoke gave to her assurance the semblance of truth—so that Lady Saxondale, deceived for once, really thought her words had produced the desired effect and that she was believed at last.

"I speak to you thus," she said, "because I wish to impress upon yourself a sense of the duties which you have to perform: I have likewise an oath to exact from you; and I feel that I could not do all this if I appeared before you in the light of a mother showing a bad example by her own depravity."

"An oath that you have to exact from me?" echoed Constance, amazed and frightened by the announcement.

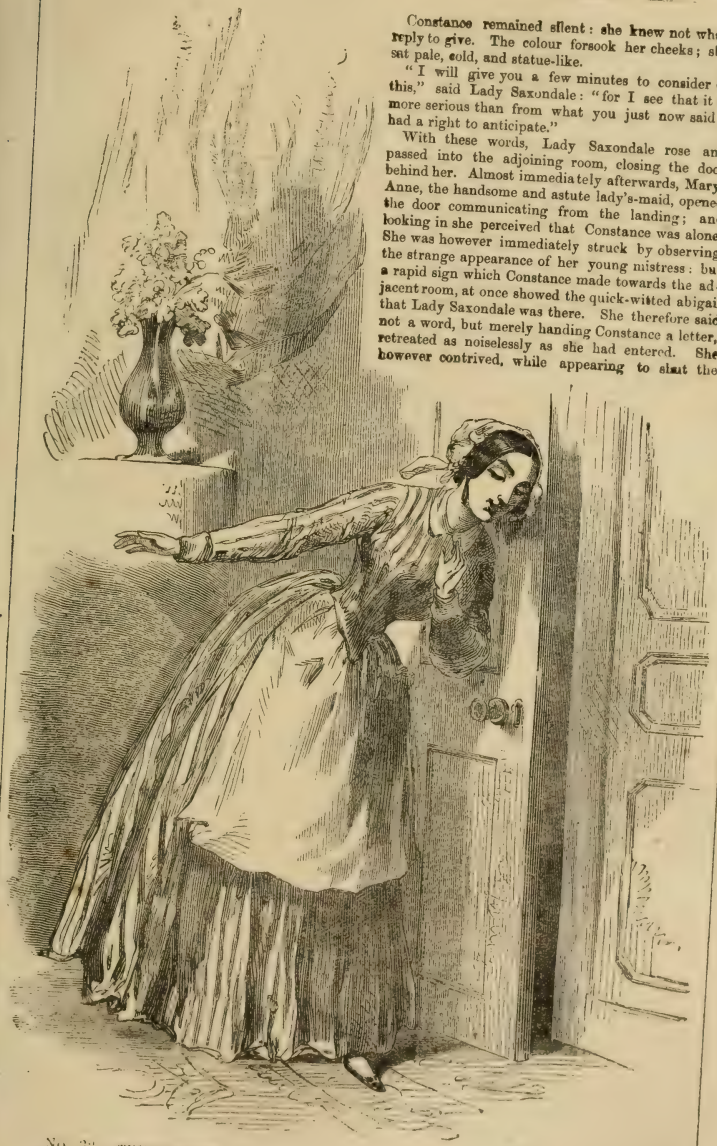
"Yes—an oath—and nothing short of the solemnity of an oath," at once responded Lady Saxondale. "The time has gone by for mere child's play. Had I been more severe than I have, Edmund would not be what he is—Juliana would not be what she is: and now it is natural that I should seek to save at least one of my children from ruin and dishonour. Constance, I have every reason to suppose that you still maintain a correspondence with the Marquis of Villebelle."

"No," answered the young lady: and with marvellous composure she looked her mother full in the face.

"If it be so, I am overjoyed," observed Lady Saxondale, though not exactly satisfied that she heard the truth: and yet she could scarcely fancy that her daughter had so soon become such an adept in dissimulation. "Under these circumstances, therefore, you will have all the less difficulty in taking the solemn oath which I now require from your lips."

"And that oath, mother?" asked Constance with an outward calm but with an inward shudder; for she expected what the required oath would be, and she dreaded as much to refuse it altogether as to take it falsely.

"The oath I demand from your lips, is, that you will never again give encouragement to the Marquis of Villebelle—never receive letters from him—never send letters to him—never meet him clandestinely—never think of him otherwise than as a stranger."



Constance remained silent: she knew not what reply to give. The colour forsook her cheeks; she sat pale, cold, and statue-like.

"I will give you a few minutes to consider of this," said Lady Saxondale: "for I see that it is more serious than from what you just now said I had a right to anticipate."

With these words, Lady Saxondale rose and passed into the adjoining room, closing the door behind her. Almost immediately afterwards, Mary-Anne, the handsome and astute lady's-maid, opened the door communicating from the landing; and looking in she perceived that Constance was alone. She was however immediately struck by observing the strange appearance of her young mistress: but a rapid sign which Constance made towards the adjacent room, at once showed the quick-witted abigail that Lady Saxondale was there. She therefore said not a word, but merely handing Constance a letter, retreated as noiselessly as she had entered. She however contrived, while appearing to shut the

door, to leave it ajar: for her curiosity was excited—she was most anxious to know what was passing between the mother and daughter—and from the sign Constance had made her, she understood that Lady Saxondale might every moment be expected to return into that room which she herself had just quitted.

Meanwhile Constance, having instantaneously recognized the handwriting of the Marquis of Villebelle, tore open the letter, and ran her eye over its contents. It was to the effect that his expectations had been realized—that he had that morning received from the French Government the notification of his appointment as Secretary to the Embassy at the Court of Madrid—that he was to leave London in four days—and that it therefore became absolutely necessary for him to see Constance as soon as possible, that they might make prompt arrangements for their marriage, which must immediately take place.

A sensation of joy thrilled through every vein and fibre of the young lady's form as she read these lines; and she forgot for the moment that her mother would re-appear in a minute or two to exact the oath. As this recollection however flashed back to her memory, she thrust the letter into her bosom with the deep resolve that, happen what might, she would neither prove unfaithful to the promise she had given her lover nor hostile to what she conceived to be her happiness. Scarcely had she thus disposed of the note,—and while the flush of joy was still lingering upon her countenance like the last tint of the setting sun upon the western sky,—Lady Saxondale re-entered the room. Approaching the sofa, she resumed her seat thereon; and then taking her daughter's hand, said, "Now, Constance, are you prepared to give me this proof of filial love which I require?"

"Why should you put so little faith in me that you exact an oath?" asked Constance.

"Because a mere pledge given is often broken, where an oath would be valued. And now let *me* ask why you hesitate to take this oath? Constance, it is for your own welfare that I am adopting so serious a course. Do not let me think that you ere now spoke falsely, and that you have really been maintaining a secret correspondence with the Marquis of Villebelle. I now tell you plainly, as I have often before hinted, that the Marquis is married. I have the positive assurance of it—and therefore if you become anything in respect to him, it can only be his mistress."

Constance made no reply. She deliberated with herself how to act, but could settle upon nothing. At length she said, "Mother, give me one week—or only three days if you will—to reflect upon all you have been saying."

"Ah! then you cannot decide at once? But you may *act* at once: and it is precisely *this* that I am resolved to frustrate. In a couple of days you will accompany me into Lincolnshire: but ere we go I wish to receive from your lips the solemn assurance that there is no chance of the Marquis being encouraged to follow you down secretly into that neighbourhood. In short, there must be an answer given at once. Therefore," added Lady Saxondale emphatically, "will you give me that oath? or by refusing it, will you leave me to my own surmises and to my own course of proceeding?"

"Mother," exclaimed Constance, now feeling that she had no alternative but to show her spirit and assume a firm mien, "you are threatening me—you are using strange language——"

"Say then at once you refuse to take the oath because you are confident of breaking it. Now, Constance," continued Lady Saxondale, rising from her seat, "it seems as if it were to become a struggle between you and me who is to be the mistress. False girl that you are! ere now you were embracing me and weeping—ere now you affected to be touched by my complaints against your rebellious brother and sister: and at present you are becoming rebellious in your turn! Take the oath—swear to me that you will not abandon yourself to this French adventurer: or I vow——"

"Mother, you dare not call him an adventurer!" exclaimed Constance, the flush of indignation appearing upon her features: "he is an honourable man——"

"Oh! since you are so vehement in his defence," interrupted Lady Saxondale, "it is another proof that you think more of him than you just now led me to suppose. But listen! The day after to-morrow you will accompany me into Lincolnshire. In the meantime I will watch you with an unceasing vigilance. Whithersoever you go I will follow you: at night you shall sleep with me in my own chamber: you shall not even send out a letter to the post without first showing it to me: nor shall you have an opportunity of communicating alone with any of the servants, lest you should make them your emissaries or your go-betweens."

"Mother," asked Constance, now deadly pale, "do you wish to destroy all love and respect in my heart?"

"I care not," ejaculated Lady Saxondale passionately. "As for love and respect, you have none: they are mere words—not feelings. You are like your brother and your sister. But depend upon it I will save you in spite of yourself."

"And what if I insist upon leaving the house?" exclaimed Constance, with a deeper irritation of spirit than she had ever yet known, much less ever before displayed.

"I will stop you," was Lady Saxondale's peremptory and imperious answer. "During your brother's minority, this house is mine—and now as well as afterwards, all these servants are mine—they are hired and paid by me. I will do as I think fit in my own house, and my domestics shall obey me. Do you understand me? will you drive me to extremes?"

"I am to understand," said Constance, pale, trembling, and agitated, "that I am a prisoner here?"

"You are," was her mother's firm and decisive reply. "If you attempt to go forth unaccompanied by me, I shall be compelled to expose you before all the servants, by ordering the hall-porter to lock the door, and by having every other issue properly guarded."

Constance burst into tears. She felt her spirit fail her: she was cowed—beaten—vanquished—almost crushed. Lady Saxondale saw the effect of the menaces she had held out, and inwardly gloried in her triumph. Withdrawing from the immediate vicinity of the sofa where Constance was seated, she placed herself on another at the farther ex-

tremity of the room; and taking up a book, she affected to read it: but her manner and her looks alike denoted that, true to her threat, she was in reality keeping watch upon her daughter.

The unhappy young lady knew not how to act. The Marquis of Villebelle would be anxiously awaiting her response: how could she possibly convey him one? In four days he was to leave England: indeed he was bound to do so, or else forfeit his diplomatic situation,—the only chance he had of retrieving his ruined fortunes—but a chance which if properly pursued, would doubtless lead him on to wealth and the fullest prosperity. Four days! there was evidently no time to lose. But if Lady Saxondale continued to watch her like a cat—if she had made up her mind thus to coerce her—she would be kept a prisoner there until the moment when she should be compelled, by the same strong will and tyrannical power, to enter the travelling-carriage that would bear her into Lincolnshire. What would the Marquis think of her silence? what would he suppose when he should come to hear of her abrupt departure into the country? Would he not imagine that she had been over-persuaded to renounce all future correspondence with him — that she had proved faithless to her pledges and her vows of love? would he not quit the country in despair? and what then was to become of her?

Such were the thoughts which swept through the brain of the unhappy young lady; and averting her countenance from the view of her mother, she wept in silence, with difficulty suppressing the sobs that convulsed her within.

Little thought the afflicted young lady that her confidential maid had been very carefully listening outside the door to the whole scene which had thus taken place since the mother's return into the room: and little thought Lady Saxondale herself that there was an eaves-dropper whose ear caught every syllable of threat and coercion that had been uttered. Such however was the case. There was Mary-Anne, —her fine figure bent forward towards the open part of the door—her red lips apart in listening eagerness—and her quick ear drinking in all that was said. When the colloquy between the mother and daughter was ended, Mary-Anne still remained there to listen if anything farther took place: but finding that a profound silence prevailed, she stole away from the door, murmuring to herself with a merry inward chuckle, "Love laughs at mothers as well as at locksmiths."

CHAPTER LIII.

JULIANA.

Lady Saxondale retained her station upon one sofa, while Constance remained upon the other until dinner was announced.

"Now," said her ladyship advancing towards her daughter and speaking in a low hurried voice as the servant held the door open for them to pass out, "you may or you may not, just as you choose, tell Juliana what has taken place. It will not alter my resolves one atom. But for your own sake I should advise you to maintain a composed demeanour in the presence of the domestics."

Constance said not a word, but rising from her seat, accompanied her mother from the apartment. They descended the magnificent staircase to the dining-room, where covers were laid for four. Edmund was not however there: but Juliana almost immediately made her appearance—and the three sat down to table. The elder sister,—who had kept her own room the whole day until this hour, for the purpose of as much as possible avoiding the mother whom she now hated,—immediately saw that there was something wrong with Constance: but she of course waited for a suitable opportunity to inquire the reason. The dinner passed over—dessert was placed upon the table—and the domestics then withdrew. The conversation, which had only been maintained for the sake of appearance in the presence of the servants, and which was even then languid enough, now ceased altogether. Juliana waited in the expectation that her mother would soon quit the table and retire to the drawing-room, as was her wont: but no—Lady Saxondale sat fast. Constance looked thoroughly unhappy: and Juliana's curiosity as well as anxiety being excited, she said to her sister, "Will you come and practise a little?"

But Constance only shook her head at her sister, and threw a deprecating look at her mother. Juliana was now completely mystified; and after another long interval of silence, she said, "Is anything the matter, Constance? You certainly are not yourself this evening."

"Ask our mother for an explanation," was the young lady's reply, delivered in a sudden paroxysm of bitterness.

But Juliana, who now considered herself altogether at variance with Lady Saxondale, did not choose to make any approach towards a real conversational footing: for, as above stated, the few remarks she had made while the footmen were present, were only for the sake of appearances. She lingered however to see whether her mother would say anything of her own accord: but Lady Saxondale shut herself up in a cold reserve and a freezing silence. Juliana, thinking that if she retired Constance would follow her, rose from the table and quitted the room.

This conduct on her elder daughter's part was precisely what Lady Saxondale reckoned upon. She knew that Juliana would not condescend to ask explanations of her relative to the melancholy appearance of Constance; and she felt equally well assured that Constance herself would not open the whole controversy in her (Lady Saxondale's) presence. Thus her ladyship calculated that she should be enabled to prevent her elder daughter from learning the cause of the younger one's sorrow, and that thus she would not have the power of rendering her any assistance in communicating with the Marquis of Villebelle.

"We will remain here, or retire to the drawing-room, whichever you please," said her ladyship to Constance, so soon as Juliana had left the apartment.

Change of scene—change of place—anything for a distraction in the present state of mind in which the young lady found herself! She therefore rose from her seat, and accompanied her mother up to the drawing-room. Juliana was not there: she had again retired to her own chamber in the hope that Constance would come to her. When coffee was served up, a message was sent to Miss Farefield to

announce that it was in readiness. This message was borne by Mary-Anne; and having delivered it, she lingered in the room with an evident anxiety to say something. Juliana accordingly questioned her; and Mary-Anne, frankly confessing that she had listened at the door in consequence of observing how strange Miss Constance looked, told Juliana all that had passed.

"Ah! is it so?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. "We must defeat this scheme of my mother's. Hasten, Mary-Anne, to the Marquis of Villebelle's lodging—tell him what has occurred——"

"I have already been, Miss," responded the lady's-maid. "I went while you were at dinner. The Marquis was terribly excited: but I soothed and cheered him by the assurance that something should be devised to help Miss Constance to freedom. He will not stir out, but will wait at home all this evening and all day to-morrow for any message or tidings that I may bring him. I suppose you know, Miss, that the travelling-carriage is ordered to be sent to the coachmaker's the first thing to-morrow, to be put in good order and have the wheels looked to ready for a journey? It is to be sent back by to-morrow evening, so as to be in readiness for the following morning."

"Then her ladyship is going to take us off into Lincolnshire?" said Juliana. "Very well: we shall see. The moment positive orders are given as to the hour when the carriage is to start, let me know. I will then tell you how we shall act."

Mary-Anne promised obedience; and Juliana remained for a few minutes longer in her chamber ere she descended to the drawing-room.

"And so my mother proposes to take us into the solitude of that dull old castle?" she said to herself when Mary-Anne had retired. "She thinks that she will coerce Constance into accompanying her; and she knows very well that for decency's sake I must go also. She reasons that I dare not remain behind to inhabit this house by myself, while my mother and sister are elsewhere. And she reasons rightly. I must guard my reputation—I must endeavour to settle myself in marriage—I must obtain an independent position in order to escape from the thraldom of this tyrant-parent. The first old peer or wealthy old commoner who may propose, shall be accepted: then will I find out my beloved Francis again, and secretly may we see each other. But in the meantime poor Constance must be restored to freedom. There is now no alternative for her but to fly to the Marquis of Villebelle."

Having thus settled her plans, Miss Farefield descended to the drawing-room. Lady Saxondale took no notice of her; and therefore it was not difficult for Juliana to make a rapid sign of intelligence to Constance,—a sign which seemed to be fraught with hope—but how or of what kind Constance for the life of her could not possibly conjecture. Another rapid sign made her comprehend the importance of preventing their mother from perceiving that this intelligence was passing between them; and Constance accordingly appeared to relapse into her mournful mood. The evening passed away dreary enough: at half-past ten o'clock Juliana rose from her seat, and observing to Constance that she was tired, quitted the room without taking the least notice of her mother.

"Whenever it suits you to retire, Constance," said Lady Saxondale, a few minutes afterwards, "I am ready: but you can do exactly as you like. If you choose to sit up till midnight, I am indifferent."

"I will go at once," replied Constance, wearied in mind and in body: for the fatigue of the former frequently operates thus upon the physical energies.

Lady Saxondale and Constance accordingly ascended to the suite of chambers belonging to the former: and declining any attendance of the lady's-maids, for fear that Constance might find an opportunity of whispering something in the ear of any one of them, Lady Saxondale locked herself in with her daughter—taking good care to conceal the key in such a way that there was no chance of Constance rising stealthily in the night and discovering it.

On the following morning, when they arose, her ladyship continued to exercise the same vigilance over her younger daughter,—never losing sight of her—scarcely even moving away from her side—and inwardly rejoicing at the idea that things still wore on thus without any explanation being given by Constance to Juliana. After breakfast, just as the latter was rising from the table to leave the room, Lady Saxondale said in a cold voice, "Miss Farefield, I am going into Lincolnshire to-morrow, Constance will accompany me. I presume that you also will proceed thither with us?"

"It suits me as well to be in Lincolnshire as in London," answered Juliana, in a voice as glacial as that of her parent.

She then left the breakfast-parlour; and as she was passing across the hall to reach the staircase, she perceived Edmund entering by the front-door at the moment. He had a very dissipated look—his garments were in disorder—and he seemed as if he had been up the whole night.

"Well, Julie," he said, in his usual flippant manner, "how are you? I suppose you think I'm a perfect stranger?"—and he gave a tipsy hiccup.

"Come this way, Edmund," said his elder sister, beckoning him somewhat mysteriously. "I want to speak to you."

They accordingly passed into the dining-room, and Juliana, making a sign for her brother to close the door, said to him, "Do you know that we are all going into Lincolnshire to-morrow morning?"

"Who's going?" asked Edmund, with a yawn. "Not I, by Jove! that's very certain. Our lady-mother and you two girls may go if you like: but I'll be hanged if I do. I am my own master now, thank heaven! and I mean to let people see it. You don't know what a jolly lark I've had during the past night. I and Harold pretty nearly killed a policeman between us: but I don't think that we were known—and, at all events, we got clear off."

"I suppose you have not been in bed all night?" said Juliana, not without a look of disgust, for she now perceived that he was half-tipsy.

"Not I: and so I was just going to lie down and have a three hours' nap—then get up again as fresh as a lark, and off to Emily——Oh! I mean ——But no matter:"—and seeing that he had committed himself, he burst out laughing.

"And pray who is Emily?" asked Juliana.

"Well, come, I will tell you, as you are older than me and quite a woman now, and therefore must know that such things are done."

"I suppose you mean that you have a mistress?" said Juliana.

"That's exactly what it is. Such a sweet pretty creature! I am sure you would like to see her."

"How can you say so?" exclaimed Juliana, affecting indignation. "And Florina—what would she think?"

"Oh! bother, she needn't know it. But I can tell you that it was quite a series of romantic adventures that threw Emily in my way," continued Edmund, whom liquor had made boastful and garrulous. "Now do listen, Julie—it is such fun. The fact is, I was after Angela Vivaldi——you know—— the celebrated *danseuse;* and I was led to believe she lived in a sweet little villa up beyond Holloway —the Seven Sisters' Road, they call the place. I dare say you know nothing about it: but it's a beautiful part of the suburbs. Well, pursuing my inquiries there, I fell in with such a strange woman—you never saw the like. I will just tell you what sort of a creature she is. She isn't so tall as you are—what would be called of a middle height for a woman: her hair was once black, but now turning gray. You never saw such masculine features in your life—and such eyes, dark in colour but bright as burning coals. Her great thick brows meet above her nose. She looks just like a man in disguise. Then, to complete this picture, fancy to yourself an old dingy coloured cloak and a dirty white cap on her head——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden thought flashed across her brain: for the picture of this woman exactly answered the description which Frank Paton had given her of the one who had called at Saxondale House.

"Why do you cry out like that?" asked Edmund, looking at his sister with surprise. "Have I frightened you with the portrait? I shall astonish you now with what I'm going to tell you. I was fool enough to employ this harridan to be a go-between for me and the supposed Angela—I say *supposed,* because it wasn't Angela who lived at the villa after all—but beautiful Emily Archer, whose dramatic name is Mademoiselle D'Alembert."

"Well, but what about this woman?" asked Juliana. "You have interested me in her—I fancy you found her capable of any treachery or mischief by your description——"

"Treachery!" echoed Edmund. "I don't know what the deuce it was: but in the middle of the night—for I went to sleep at her cottage—she suddenly came and awoke me, and in a strange state of excitement bundled me out of the place. I really did think I saw a dagger in her hand: but it might have been fancy. Well, after that, I fell in with seven mounted highwaymen, led by a woman disguised as a man——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana. "Go on."

"I have not the slightest doubt she was the one that stopped Marlow and Malton," continued Edmund: "for she called herself Captain Chandos to me——"

"The female highwayman indeed!" observed Juliana, who experienced a sad sickening at the heart, as she remembered that this was the sister of her much-loved Francis Paton.

"Yes: but if she had been alone, she wouldn't have succeeded so well, I can tell you," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "But with five ruffians to back her——"

"I thought you said seven," remarked Juliana.

"Ah! five or seven, they were quite enough to overpower me in spite of the desperate resistance I made. I think I must have nearly done for one of them, and seriously injured another. You don't know how I fought——"

"But that strange woman," said Juliana—"where did you tell me she lived? Do you know, my dear Edmund, I am very much interested in these adventures of your's: so you must tell me all the details. In the Seven Sisters' Road, you say?"

"Just in that neighbourhood. The harridan's cottage is situated in a field upon the left as you go up—not far from *Hornsey Wood Tavern.* It's a lonely and queer place. But why do you ask so many questions? Are you anxious to visit the scene of my adventures?"

"Heaven forbid! But you had better go upstairs now and lie down: you look very much in want of rest. I dare say we shall have an opportunity presently of renewing our chat."

"Well, I do feel uncommon seedy," rejoined Edmund, with another terrific yawn: "so I will take your advice."

Thus speaking he quitted the dining-room where this colloquy had taken place: but Juliana remained there for a few minutes to reflect upon all she had just heard. She was determined to see this woman of whom she and her brother had been speaking. She had two reasons for resolving upon this course: first, that she might endeavour to glean the cause of the mysterious connexion between her mother and that female—and secondly, that she might make the woman in a certain way serve her design of giving freedom to Constance. Her first thought was to set off at once and find the woman without delay: but a second thought showed her the necessity of waiting till she had ascertained the precise hour when the travelling-carriage was to be at the front-door on the morrow. Moreover, even if she were at once acquainted with this fact, she still saw the prudence of delay, because if she went so soon, the woman might take it into her head to call upon Lady Saxondale immediately afterwards, instead of waiting till the hour when Juliana meant to tell her to be at the house—and if she did thus call prematurely, the young lady's scheme might be defeated. Therefore, having well reflected upon the matter, Juliana resolved to postpone until the evening her contemplated visit.

We need not dwell upon any farther details in respect to the vigilant guardianship exercised by Lady Saxondale over Constance throughout this day. Suffice it to observe that never did military sentinel more jealously or closely watch a prisoner than this patrician lady did her younger daughter. The only consolation experienced by poor Constance, was derived from the circumstance that Juliana contrived, unseen by her mother, to make another significant sign indicative of hope. Constance therefore saw that her sister either suspected, or had by some means, ascertained the precise cause and nature of this vigilance which their mother was exercising over her, and that she was secretly working

in her behalf. But in what Juliana's hope consisted—how she was working—or to what issue the whole affair was by her intervention to be brought, the young lady could not possibly conjecture.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening—after coffee had been partaken of in the drawing-room—that Juliana retired to her chamber to hold another consultation with herself what course she was to pursue. She had not as yet succeeded in ascertaining at what hour the travelling-carriage was ordered for the morrow. Her mother had said nothing upon the subject—and she was too proud to ask the question: but without obtaining this particular information, she did not see how it was possible to render the woman whom she meant to visit, useful in forwarding her designs. While she was pondering in this embarrassment, her chamber door opened, and Mary-Anne made her appearance.

"I have some news, Miss," said the abigail. "Her ladyship has this moment issued orders for the carriage to be ready at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"This is just the information I required," exclaimed Juliana joyously. "Now, Mary-Anne, you must proceed at once to the Marquis of Villebelle, and tell him to be in the immediate neighbourhood with a carriage, post-chaise, or vehicle of some sort by at least a quarter to nine in the morning. Arrange with him where he will be thus waiting with the conveyance. The rest may be left to me. And, Mary-Anne," exclaimed Miss Farefield, as the maid was about to quit the chamber, "you must procure for me by some means or another the key of the side-gate, as I shall have to go out to-night."

"You, Miss?" cried Mary-Anne.

"Yes: but I cannot enter into explanations now. You shall know everything hereafter. I have all my plans well settled and arranged in my mind. Of course you will accompany my sister to-morrow, should she succeed in escaping from her ladyship and joining the Marquis of Villebelle. And now lose no time—but hasten to his lordship's lodgings."

Mary-Anne accordingly departed to execute this commission; and Juliana descended once more to the drawing-room, where her mother and sister were still seated—the one a vigilant sentinel, the other a closely-guarded prisoner. Edmund,—who instead of his three hours' nap, had been sleeping the whole day in order to shake off the effects of the previous night's debauch,—now made his appearance; and strolling with the half-careless half-languid air of a dissipated rake into the room, with his hat and gloves on, ready to sally forth again, he said, "Well, mother, so I understand you are all going into the country to-morrow?"

"Such is my intention," was Lady Saxondale's cold reply.

"Well, I wish you luck. As for me, I would see the precious old castle burnt before I would go and bury myself in it."

"No one asked for your company, sir," replied Lady Saxondale; "and therefore perhaps you will spare your comments. By the bye, I may as well inform you that if you take that list of which you recently spoke, to Marlow and Malton, they will attend to it. You understand me?"

"To be sure. I shan't forget to do so. But about the allowance?"

"Every arrangement I made with you will be duly carried out by the solicitors."

"All right," exclaimed Lord Saxondale. "And now bye-bye. I wish you all a pleasant journey."

Thus speaking, he waved his hand in a half-patronizing half-familiar fashion, and without offering to embrace either his mother or his sisters, lounged out of the room, to the great relief of Lady Saxondale, who was heartily glad to get rid of him.

"Did I understand my brother correctly?" asked Juliana, after a pause, and addressing herself to her mother with frigid voice and look, "that it is your purpose to proceed into Lincolnshire to-morrow?"

"Is this the first you have heard of it?" asked Lady Saxondale, looking steadily at the elder daughter.

"The first. I do not remember that you had condescended to give me any information upon the subject; and as for poor Constance, she seems to be overwhelmed by some melancholy which I cannot understand, but which at all events has the effect of placing a seal upon her lips."

"It is my intention to leave London to-morrow," said Lady Saxondale.

"Perhaps, then, you will have the goodness to inform me at what hour you purpose to leave," continued Juliana, as if previously altogether ignorant on the subject, "so that I may make whatsoever preparations are necessary."

"I have not as yet decided upon the hour," returned Lady Saxondale, resolved to keep Constance as much in the dark as possible with respect to her arrangements, so that the abruptness and the early hour of departure might take her by surprise, leaving no opportunity for escape;—and though for a moment she had fancied that Juliana might have heard something through the servants, she was now well satisfied to the contrary. Thus the elder daughter's duplicity deceived the astute and keen-sighted mother.

"If you are uncertain as to the hour of departure," said Miss Fairfield, "I had better commence my preparations to-night."

Lady Saxondale gave no answer, but affected to return to the book which lay open on the table before her. Juliana made another quick sign of intelligence, indicative of hope, to Constance; and bidding her good night—but without taking any farther notice of her mother—left the room. Ascending to her own chamber she whiled away half-an-hour in consulting a map of London, and in preparations for departure, the latter being made in case the journey should really take place, with or without Constance. At the expiration of that half-hour, Mary-Anne re-appeared.

"Everything is arranged with his lordship," she said, alluding to the Marquis of Villebelle. "He will have a carriage in waiting round the corner of the next street."

"Good," said Juliana. "And now for the key of the side-door?"

"Here it is," replied Mary-Anne. "Have you any farther commands, Miss?"

"No: none at present. Does the Marquis seem in good spirits?"

"He is full of hope, Miss, in consequence of the

assurance which I have given him that you are doing your utmost in behalf of Miss Constance."

"And we will succeed, too, Mary-Anne!" exclaimed Juliana in a tone of confidence: "I am certain we shall succeed. You had however better not remain here any longer now; but bring me word when my mother and sister and the household have retired."

Mary-Anne accordingly left the young lady's chamber; and another hour passed. It was now eleven o'clock; and the faithful abigail returned with the intimation that the inmates of the mansion had sought their respective chambers. Juliana was in readiness for her expedition. She had already put on a common straw garden-bonnet—the plainest dress she had in her wardrobe—and also the most unassuming shawl that she could find. Stealing down stairs, followed by Mary-Anne who carried the light, she passed out of the rear of the premises —issued from the side-gate—and telling the faithful maid that she need not sit up for her, hastened away in the direction of Oxford Street. There she entered a cab, and directed the driver to take her up to the Seven Sisters' Road in the neighbourhood of Holloway.

This ride took the best portion of an hour; and it was midnight when the intrepid Juliana descended from the vehicle at the commencement of the Seven Sisters' Road. She paid the man liberally beforehand as an earnest of her good faith that she would return; and bidding him wait for her, no matter how long, she hastened along the road. It was a beautiful clear night—so bright and lovely indeed that the small print of a book might have been read; and therefore all objects were visible to even a considerable distance. The map of London and its environs which the young lady had taken care to consult previous to leaving home, had sufficiently defined to her comprehension the whereabouts of the *Hornsey Wood Tavern;* and from what she had gleaned from her brother's lips she had little difficulty in discovering the cottage of which he had spoken. But when she turned out of the main road and began to traverse the field which it was necessary to pass through in order to reach the place of destination, she could not help feeling a sense of utter loneliness; and this being the first time in her life she had ever found herself in such a position—alone, at the midnight hour, in the open country,—it is no wonder if for a minute she experienced a vague and shuddering terror. But naturally endowed with a strong mind, she speedily recovered her fortitude, and resolutely advanced towards the cottage.

She now observed that it was indeed a wretched poverty-stricken tumble-down habitation; and as in the minds of the upper classes the loneliness and misery of a dwelling invariably associate themselves with the idea of treachery and crime, Juliana again felt that sense of shuddering terror come over her which she had already experienced. She therefore hesitated to proceed any farther with her present adventure: but the next moment conquering her fears, and blaming herself for even transiently giving way to them, she entered the little enclosure surrounded by the broken fence—advanced up to the door—and knocked with her closed hand.

For a few moments all continued silent within; and Juliana began to fear that the woman might not be at home. She knocked again: an upper window was then opened—and a harsh voice, but just sufficiently feminine to show that it was a woman's, demanded who was there.

"I wish to speak to you for a few moments," replied Juliana, "on very particular business."

"But who are you? and from whom do you come?" inquired the speaker from the window.

"Are you the same person who has been on two or three occasions to Saxondale House?" asked Juliana, though by the glimpse she caught of the countenance which was now thrust forth from the window, and which was surrounded by a great white cap, she felt assured she was speaking to the right individual.

"Yes—I am the same. Wait a moment: I will let you in."

The window was closed; and almost immediately afterwards the rays of a light glimmered forth through the dingy panes. Juliana heard the woman moving about in the room above as if hurrying on some clothing; and in two or three minutes more, steps were heard descending the stairs within. The door was now opened; and the woman appeared, holding a light in her hand. The glance which Juliana threw upon her at once cleared up any doubt which might have remained in respect to her identity. She had on the dirty white cap, and had thrown over her shoulders the dingy cloak that had been previously mentioned by Francis Paton and Edmund; and moreover her features exactly answered the description given from the same sources.

Juliana entered the hut, and was conducted into the little wretchedly-furnished room on the ground-floor. Madge Somers looked very hard at the young lady; and instantly recognizing the likeness, she said, "Why, you must be Lady Saxondale's daughter?"

"I am," replied Juliana; "and therefore you may suppose it is under no ordinary circumstances that my mother has sent me to you this night."

"For what purpose?" asked Madge, in her own terse and dogmatic style.

"Lady Saxondale wishes to see you on most particular business at nine o'clock punctually in the morning. Can you be at Saxondale House precisely at that hour?"

"I can—and I will," answered Madge, evidently astonished at the invitation. "Is anything wrong, Miss?"

"My mother will herself explain the business," answered Juliana. "Of course it is connected with the secrets subsisting between yourself and her——"

"But am I to understand," interrupted Madge, looking very hard at Juliana, "that her ladyship has afforded you any insight into those secrets?"

"Surely your own good sense must tell you," rejoined Miss Farefield, meeting the woman's gaze with the steadiness of her own, "that my mother could scarcely have entrusted me with such a mission as this, unless she had given me the fullest explanations. I do indeed know what the secret is that enables you to hold my mother in your power," added the wily Juliana, hazarding the remark in order to draw out the woman.

And cunning though Madge herself was, yet Miss Farefield did succeed in drawing her out. She pretended to be weary, and was therefore invited to

rest herself awhile; and during the best part of an hour that she tarried at the cottage, there was of course some conversation. Upon what topic, therefore, could they talk, save and except concerning the matter to which Juliana had at random alluded, but respecting which Madge Somers naturally fancied that the young lady possessed the fullest information? So well did the crafty Miss Farefield manage her portion of the discourse, that until the end of this interview she sustained in Madge's mind the impression that she had known everything previously; and when she took her leave, she departed with the full knowledge of all that she wanted to learn. She took good care to slip ten or a dozen sovereigns into Madge's hand; and the woman faithfully promised to be at Saxondale House at nine o'clock.

Of strange contexture were the thoughts of Juliana Farefield as she retraced her way across the field into the Seven Sisters' Road. She had learnt her mother's secret: but it was a secret that appalled her. If, ere she had set foot within the cottage of Madge Somers, she had lived ten thousand years and in that time had exhausted herself in conjectures as to what her mother's secret could really be, she never would have lighted upon the truth. The wildest flights of fancy never could have reached that point to which accident had thus suddenly and strangely brought her. Even as she pondered upon that stupendous secret, she felt like one walking in a dream. She could scarcely believe in the astounding reality. Once or twice she actually stopped short to ask herself whether it were indeed true that she had heard what she thought she had heard, and that she knew what she believed herself to know. She looked around to fix her attention upon particular objects near, in order to acquire the certainty that she was really awake and to satisfy herself it was no delusive vision of the night. Then she walked on, and reached the vehicle which was waiting for her at the place where she had left it.

The morning had just begun to dawn,—the bright summer morning, bringing back the presence of day to arouse a sleeping world, to bid the flowers lift their heads and open their buds, and to signal the matin hymn from the feathered choristers in trees and hedgerows. It was four o'clock when Juliana alighted from the cab in the vicinage of Saxondale House; and with her veil carefully drawn down over her countenance, so as to conceal her features from the observation of the policeman whom an amorous cook was just stealthily letting out up the area-steps of a neighbouring mansion,—Juliana sped on to the side-gate. There she let herself in by aid of the key that she had with her, and passed safely into the mansion. Then, locking the back door, and fastening the bolts so as to avert suspicion of any one having issued from the house during the night, she regained her own chamber.

Thoroughly exhausted with her adventure, she speedily sought her couch, and fell into a deep slumber: but the particulars of her interview with Madge Somers followed her in her dreams.

She did not awake till eight o'clock, and would not perhaps have aroused herself then, had not Mary-Anne knocked at her chamber-door. Juliana hastened to give her admittance; and the lady's-maid bent an inquiring look upon her young mistress. But Miss Farefield had not the slightest intention of giving the abigail any account of her nocturnal expedition: she therefore spoke hurriedly and evasively—promised to tell her every thing at a more fitting opportunity—and purposely gave her some commissions to execute which would occupy the next half-hour and thus prevent farther conversation. Mary-Anne did not perceive that she was treated with any deficiency of confidence, but expressed her delight at the assurance which Juliana vaguely gave her that measures were taken to ensure the emancipation of Constance from the close thraldom in which she was now held.

At half-past eight another lady's-maid—Lucilla by name—knocked at Juliana's door; and upon being desired to enter, she said, "If you please Miss, her ladyship purposes to leave at nine o'clock punctually, and hopes that you are now ready for breakfast, and that your things are all packed up."

"Here is the box I intend to take with me," said Juliana. "You can send up one of the footmen to fetch it down and cord it."

Miss Farefield then descended to the breakfast-parlour, where she found her mother and sister already seated at table. Lady Saxondale appeared inclined to unbend in some slight degree towards her elder daughter—probably deeming it convenient that they should be upon less chilling terms with each other, especially as they had a long journey before them, during which the frigidity of silence would prove irksome enough. Juliana herself had no objection to affect an inclination to meet her mother half way towards reconcilement, the better to lull her into the completest security and confidence as to the success of her own plan, so that the counter-plot which was arranged to happen should strike her ladyship with a suddenness that would leave her paralyzed and helpless, thereby ensuring the escape of Constance.

"You look pale, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale with an appearance of concern.

"I have not slept well, mother, and have a violent headache."

"The travelling will do you good."

"I hope so," rejoined Miss Farefield.

They talked on in this strain for a little longer; and at ten minutes to nine Lady Saxondale said, "We had now better put on our things; for the travelling-carriage will be almost immediately at the door. We have post-horses, of course. Two of the footmen will ride on the box: Mary-Anne and Lucilla will go in the rumble behind."

Juliana once more ascended to her chamber, while Constance accompanied Lady Saxondale to the latter's suite of apartments. But we should observe that the elder sister had again found an opportunity to make a sign indicative of hope to Constance. Still was this young lady a prey to the deepest suspense as to the meaning of all these signals of intelligence: but still, likewise, did she derive some consolation therefrom, for she stood so deeply in need of solace!

The travelling-carriage, with four horses and two postilions, drove up to the front of Saxondale House. The boxes were all corded in the hall, ready to be stowed away upon the roof of the vehicle, where they were now speedily packed in the usual manner. The two footmen who were to accompany the equipage, were in attendance; as were also Mary-Anne

CONSTANCE

and Lucilla. Lady Saxondale and her two daughters were now alone waited for. The clocks were striking nine as they descended the great marble staircase, dressed for travelling. Constance held her mother's arm—the last precaution which her ladyship fancied that it would be necessary to take in order to ensure the departure of her younger daughter from London and guard against the possibility of flight. Juliana followed a few paces behind. They crossed the hall—they issued forth from the mansion—one of the footmen held open the carriage-door, the steps of which were down. A glow of triumph thrilled through the entire form of Lady Saxondale as she felt confident that all her plans had now reached the acme of success; but a similar glow was experienced by Juliana Farefield, as she caught sight of Madge Somers in her old cloak, her dirty white cap, and with her forbidding looks of masculine harshness, rapidly approaching.

"You get in first, Constance," said Lady Saxondale: but at that instant she also caught sight of Madge Somers, and a ghastly paleness seized upon her as she staggered a pace or two back: then utterly losing her presence of mind, she advanced to meet the woman, entirely forgetting everything that regarded Constance.

"Fly, my dear sister!" were the quickly-whispered words that Juliana now all in a moment breathed in the ears of Constance. "Round the first turning to the left—and you are saved!"

Constance threw one look of affectionate gratitude upon her sister, and sped away in the direction indicated,—the faithful Mary-Anne following close upon her heels. The footman—Lucilla—the servants who were loitering on the threshold to behold the departure—even the very postilions themselves, were struck with amazement at this precipitate flight of the young lady and her maid; and those who happened to turn their eyes the next moment upon Juliana, saw that her features were radiant with an expression of satisfaction and triumph.

All that we have just related was the work of a few moments, during which Lady Saxondale had encountered Madge Somers and quickly demanded, "Why do you seek me now?"

"By your own commands," replied the woman, somewhat startled by this abrupt and most unexpected question.

"My commands?" echoed her ladyship. "What mean you?"—and a thousand wild terrific apprehensions flitted in an instant through her brain with agonizing poignancy.

"Did you not send one of your daughters to me last night——"

A shriek rose up to Lady Saxondale's lips—but she repressed it ere uttered; and feeling like one on whom frenzy was fastening, she quickly turned her head. Juliana was standing alone by the carriage-door. Lady Saxondale rushed up to the vehicle and looked in: but no Constance was there. That some hideous treachery had been practised, she felt convinced; and her looks instantaneously flashed upon Juliana. Then, in her elder daughter's countenance did the wretched, almost maddened Lady Saxondale read the expression of malignant triumph which showed that the treachery was her's and that it had fully succeeded!

For an instant the unhappy lady stood in utter bewilderment, not knowing how to act; but with a sudden effort she regained some of her lost composure, and darting a terrible look upon Juliana, made an impatient gesture for Madge Somers to follow her up the steps into the house. The next moment her ladyship and the woman traversed the hall, entered the dining-room, and thus disappeared from the view of Juliana and the amazed beholders of this scene which was so extraordinary and so incomprehensible to them.

Miss Farefield herself, not choosing to remain standing in the street as a target for the scrutinising looks of the servants and postilions,—and as a matter of course not having a single word of explanation to give, even if she would have condescended to any,—slowly ascended into the hall; and observing to one of the lacqueys, "If her ladyship should want me, I am here,"—passed at once into the breakfast-parlour.

The servants all exchanged glances of bewilderment. Every one appeared to ask the rest what on earth all this meant: but none could even venture so much as a conjecture to the solution of the mystery. Certain it was that Miss Constance had fled precipitately, with Mary-Anne closely following: certain also was it that Lady Saxondale had been strangely agitated on beholding that queer-looking woman with whom she had now shut herself up in the dining-room;—and certain likewise was it that Miss Juliana had experienced some good reason for triumphant satisfaction. Yes—all these things were certain enough: but what was the explanation of them? One part of the drama looked uncommonly like an elopement: the rest of it defied all conjecture.

Juliana had not been quite ten minutes in the breakfast-parlour, when the door opened and her mother appeared upon the threshold. She was ghastly pale—a ghastliness enhanced by the brunette tint of her complexion, the delicate duskiness of which now seemed to have changed into the sallowness of death. Her lips were blanched—her eyes were fixed, but shot forth strange fires. She was evidently a prey to emotions agitating in her bosom with all the pent-up fury of the boiling lava imprisoned within the volcano that still outwardly seems to sleep.

"I am ready," she said, in a cold but deep voice.

Juliana started for an instant as this intimation that the journey was to be pursued met her ears: for she feared lest Constance had been brought back. But immediately recovering herself she rose from her seat and followed her mother from the room. Lady Saxondale, who had now drawn down her veil to conceal from the domestics the horrible feelings which she knew to be reflected on her countenance, passed steadily on to the carriage—entered it—and took her seat. Juliana followed; and a glance at the interior of the vehicle quieted her apprehensions in a moment, showing her that Constance was not there. It was consequently with a renewed sensation of joyousness that she likewise entered the vehicle.

"Are we to wait, my lady?" asked the footman, still holding the carriage door open; and he spoke hesitatingly, while perplexity and bewilderment were depicted in his features.

"No: we will proceed at once," was Lady Saxondale's reply: but it struck Juliana that it was given

in the bewilderment of one who was in a state between stupor and despair.

The steps were put up—the door was closed—the footman leapt to the box—and the equipage dashed away from the door of Saxondale House.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE TETE-A-TETE IN THE TRAVELLING-CARRIAGE.

THE carriage pursued its way at a rapid rate through the streets of the metropolis: the suburbs were reached and passed—and the open country was gained. Nearly an hour had elapsed since the vehicle quitted Park Lane; and all this while not a single word was spoken inside.

Lady Saxondale had thrown herself back in the corner of the carriage, and had remained perfectly motionless from the commencement of the journey: her veil was still over her countenance, so that Juliana was totally unable to obtain the slightest indication as to her mother's feelings or what was now passing in her mind. The young lady herself sat absorbed in thought, revolving all she had heard during the past night and all that had happened this morning: she wondered where her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle were at the moment—and with a subdued sigh she thought of Francis Paton.

Presently Lady Saxondale slowly raised herself from that reclining posture, and as slowly lifted her veil. Juliana mechanically turned her eyes upon her mother, and gave a sudden start—indeed, could scarcely repress a scream—on beholding the fiendish expression with which that mother was regarding her. Grandly handsome as Lady Saxondale naturally was, she seemed at that moment absolutely hideous: her features were all convulsed with a satanic rage—her set teeth gleamed between her ashy lips which contortion kept apart—her nobly pencilled brows were corrugated—her lofty forehead was contracted into wrinkles—while her eyes glared, or even glowered in a manner horrible to contemplate.

"Ah! you are frightened, detestable girl!" she said in a thick husky voice: then as her countenance gradually assumed a more natural appearance, still however remaining ghastly pale, and with sinister fires gleaming in the eyes, she added, "Juliana, what do you think of yourself after all that you have done?"

"If you allude to the affair of Constance," responded the elder daughter, now having recovered the most perfect self-possession, "I rejoice and I triumph."

"Perish Constance!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, vehemently. "I cast her off—I abandon her for ever! I discard her: she is no longer a daughter of mine! Let her go, to become the paramour of a married man: let her drag out her life in infamy, shame, and dishonour! When the French adventurer is tired of her, he will thrust her off. She will perhaps come back to me, full of contrition and remorse: I will spurn her. Then she will go and fling herself into the arms of some new lover; and he in turn will cast her away from him when satiated. Perhaps she will come back again to me: I will spurn her with my foot as before. Then she will continue in the ways of profligacy, passing from lover to lover, but each time descending lower and lower in the social scale—till at length she will take her infamy with her into the streets. And there," added Lady Saxondale, with accents of bitter irony, but which were almost immediately succeeded by a strange and unnatural laugh resembling an hysterical shriek—"she will drag herself on through all pollutions—there the daughter of patrician parents will suffer all insults and all ignominies, till at length her wretched career will close in a ditch or a lazar-house!"

"I have listened to this tirade of your's, mother, with unspeakable horror and the deepest disgust," said Juliana, at first somewhat frightened by the terrible vehemence with which Lady Saxondale spoke, but afterwards showing an air of loathing and abhorrence. "Whatever Constance may have this day done, it was your tyranny that drove her to it; and as for the picture you have drawn, it is quite clear that in your malignant wickedness you depict what you desire should happen."

"You are adopting proud and haughty language towards me," said Lady Saxondale, now bending upon Juliana looks as ferocious as those of a tigress. "Infamous girl! what diabolical treachery did you practise during the past night!"

"And what a fearful secret did I learn, mother," retorted Miss Farefield.

"Ah! a secret—yes! I know that you discovered it: I know that by means of the most detestable artifice you wormed it out of that woman who, cunning as she generally is, was nevertheless thrown off her guard by your matchless duplicity. Well, that secret—go and proclaim it if you like! Are you disposed to do so? On my soul, it has cost me so much to keep it, that it would now take but little to induce me to proclaim it to the world at once. Therefore, Juliana, do not think that by the knowledge of this secret you have got me in your power, so that I shall henceforth cringe to your tyranny. If you imagine this, you are very much mistaken."

Lady Saxondale had spoken with extreme volubility, and in such a state of frenzied excitement that her daughter had never seen her exhibit before. She would perhaps have gone on longer: but exhausted and breathless, she sank back in the corner of the carriage.

"It is no use, mother, for you to affect an utter recklessness with regard to this secret," said Juliana, in a voice that was spiteful in its very coldness. "You know perfectly well that all you have just been saying is not only false, but purely nonsensical. As long as you cling to life, will you cling to that secret: but even if you had made up your mind to suicide, you would not tell that secret to a living soul ere you accomplished the work of self-destruction. You might leave the secret, or rather its elucidation, written upon paper, so as to exercise a posthumous revenge against one whom you hate most cordially: but you would not dare look the world in the face and explain all the past."

"You know not what I shall dare—you know not what I shall be goaded to!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, quivering all over with a terrible rage, which appeared as if it must vent itself by doing her daughter a mischief—for it was the rage of the tiger-cat. "Why are you here?" she suddenly exclaimed, after a few moments' pause: "why did you

not go away with your sister? or why do you not run after your Francis Paton? Ah! have I called a blush up to those proud cheeks of your's? What are you? the mistress of a menial hind! You have had a lacquey for your paramour——faugh!"

"Go on, mother," said Juliana, the carnation hue suddenly flitting from her cheeks and leaving them colourless; but still she battled successfully against the rage which Lady Saxondale's words had excited within her. "Go on, mother: you will not provoke me to come to actual blows with you; for *that* I presume to be your object now. It would be a pretty thing for the postilions and servants to learn that the brilliant Lady Saxondale and her daughter fought like two cats in their travelling-carriage?"

"Juliana, how is all this to end?" exclaimed the miserable woman; and with an involuntary motion she appeared to wring her hands. "My God! is it possible that all this has happened? Nothing but troubles have come upon me lately; and when I told you just now that I cared not if the world knew everything, I spoke my thoughts. But, Ah! I remember—you then talked of suicide, and in connexion with myself. If you only knew how near I am resolving at this moment upon that catastrophe, you would say naught to goad me on to it. But again I ask, how is all this to end? You and I, Juliana, cannot live together upon these terms."

"It was not I who offered to accompany you down into Lincolnshire," was the young lady's freezing reply. "By the mere fact of your coming, you knew that I was bound to accompany you. Besides, after your interview with that woman just now, you came and told me you were ready. Did not this mean that you desired me to follow you?"

"I was half mad at the time—I knew not what I was doing," answered Lady Saxondale. "The carriage was at the door—flight from home seemed in itself a relief—it appeared as if one could flee away from thought! Besides, it would not do to stultify oneself before all the domestics by countermanding the carriage. And yet, good heavens! what must they have thought to see Constance disappear thus suddenly, and me compelled to conduct that vile harridan into the house—then closet myself with her——Oh! it is enough to drive one to frenzy! But after all, I was wrong not to institute a chase after Constance. We will return—we will retrace our way!"—and Lady Saxondale was about to thrust her head forth to command the postilions to stop, when Juliana pulled her back.

"If you think of returning to London in the hope of discovering Constance," she said quickly, "you may save yourself the trouble. The arrangements were so admirably made that all pursuit and search would be useless."

"And these arrangements were made by you!" cried Lady Saxondale, fiercely. "Consummate hypocrite that you are, Juliana—I hate you! I hate you!"

"You call me a hypocrite—do you? Well, it is by no means unusual or unnatural for daughters to take after their mothers," retorted Juliana.

"Oh! this becomes intolerable!" said Lady Saxondale, now utterly unable to restrain a violent outburst of agonised feelings: and she not only wrung her hands, but gave way to her tears.

Yes—that proud, haughty, high-spirited woman wept bitterly; and convulsive sobs rent her bosom. She felt herself subdued—crushed—overwhelmed. Her soul was filled with hideous passions, chiefly with a horrible spite against the daughter by her side—but a spite which she knew not how to vent. She could have turned round and dragged her nails down Juliana's face—she would have gloried in spoiling that grand beauty which was a reflection of her own—she could have torn out her daughter's eyes—have dashed out her teeth—have dug her nails deep into Juliana's flesh! How she restrained herself she scarcely knew: and it was perhaps because she felt that her rage was thus so impotent that she gave vent to her spite in tears, and sobs, and in the wringing of her hands. But this outburst of emotion calmed the unnatural excitement to which she had been worked up; and she recovered some degree of composure. Drawing down her veil again, she relapsed into silence.

It is not our purpose to dwell at any unnecessary length upon this journey into Lincolnshire—a journey which lasted until the evening. We must however observe that little was the conversation which ensued for the rest of the way between the mother and daughter. Lady Saxondale occasionally broke forth into fresh reproaches, to which Juliana was not slow in giving equally cutting retorts: until at length the mother, wearied of the horrible excitement attendant upon these fierce bickerings, shut herself up in a sullen reserve. In this way the last three hours of the journey were passed; and as the sun was setting, the towers and battlemented buildings of Saxondale Castle gradually developed themselves to the view of the travellers.

The carriage dashed up to the front entrance of the castle, where the servants were assembled to receive their mistress and her daughters. A letter which Lady Saxondale had written on the previous day, made them aware of her intended visit: for we should observe that there was a full complement of domestics always kept up at Saxondale Castle. The moment the equipage stopped, the servants perceived that her ladyship was accompanied by her elder daughter only; and when, after their mistress and Juliana had passed into the hall, attended by the senior domestics and Lucilla, those who remained outside learnt from the footmen who came with the carriage under what mysterious circumstances Miss Constance Farefield had suddenly disappeared with Mary-Anne, they were as much astonished as the household in Park Lane had been.

Two years had elapsed since Lady Saxondale had last visited the castle. Her visits were neither frequent in themselves, nor very lengthy when they were paid,—it being generally believed that her ladyship had no particular affection for her country-seat in Lincolnshire. During that interval of two years no change had taken place in the ancient edifice: nor indeed during the far longer interval of nineteen years since first we introduced our reader to that castellated mansion, had time effected much visible alteration. There it was still, that ancient castle—frowning in gloomy grandeur above the river and over the landscape through which the Trent winds its way!—there it was, that assemblage of buildings, constituting in their vastness one of the grandest and most remarkable mansions belonging to the British Aristocracy!

Lady Saxondale and Juliana ascended to their re-

spective bed-rooms, each attended by a maid; and having achieved some alterations in their toilet after their long, dusty, and fatiguing journey, they descended to the dining-room, where a late dinner—or rather supper, as it might be called in strict reference to the hour—was served up. But neither felt much inclination for the dainties spread before them; and they soon proceeded to the drawing-room, to take the more welcome refreshment of tea or coffee.

What a host of recollections now swept back to the mind of Lady Saxondale! It was to this room, nineteen years back, that Ralph Farefield had followed her from the chamber of the dead old Lord Saxondale, to satisfy himself that the child whose restoration had been announced to him was really there. As the widow of that old lord now cast her eyes around, every incident of that scene appeared to spring up to her view with as vivid a reality as when it took place at the time. There was the spot where Mabel was sitting at the moment with the child in her arms: there was also the spot where her ladyship's father, the Rev. Mr. Clifton, had said in the fervour of his grateful piety, "God in his mercy be thanked for the dear babe's restoration!"—there too was the window-recess where she and Ralph had conversed together when she gave him that appointment in the chapel—an appointment which he kept, but whence he never departed alive! And where now were all these of whom she was thus thinking? Ralph Farefield had perished miserably and mysteriously; and the lady had unexpectedly and startlingly found herself not long back confronted with his embalmed corpse in the museum at Dr. Ferney's dwelling. Years had elapsed since her father the Rev. Mr. Clifton had gone down into the tomb; and many a sun had since shone upon the church and many a winter's wind had howled around the walls of that same sacred edifice in the vaults of which his remains were interred. And Mabel—she likewise was no more: but a few days only had elapsed since she departed from this life, as detailed in a previous chapter. But the child which nineteen years back that same Mabel had held in her arms in this same drawing-room—for whose restoration Mr. Clifton had poured forth his gratitude—and whose presence there had so cruelly damped all the magnificent hopes and aspirations of Ralph Farefield,—that child had grown up to become a bitter curse to Lady Saxondale—the object of her hatred—and as she herself had so bitterly expressed it, "a viper that she had cherished to sting her!"

As her ladyship sat in this drawing-room with Juliana on the first evening of their return to the castle, her thoughts were assuredly of no agreeable complexion. All the memories with which this very room was associated, were fraught with unspeakable mournfulness for her. A deep gloom succeeding the terrific excitement of all the earlier part of the day, had fallen upon her spirits; and she felt a presentiment of approaching evil. She regretted having come to Saxondale Castle: the silence that prevailed throughout the edifice, appeared to strike her with a tomb-like awfulness. In London she was in the midst of life and gaiety. The mansion in Park Lane being smaller, there were the constant sounds of persons moving about the house: but here, in this vast baronial edifice, nothing was heard. In the metropolis, splendid equipages were constantly dashing by the mansion: here naught went by except the silent river pursuing its steady, noiseless, and inanimate way. In London, Lady Saxondale might have plunged into all imaginable gaieties for the purpose of drowning thought: here she must reckon upon passing hours and hours alone, or else in the companionship of a daughter whom she detested almost as much as she hated Edmund himself. Altogether, Lady Saxondale experienced a deep regret that she should have quitted the metropolis and come down into Lincolnshire.

Juliana sat apparently half-dozing in her chair, but in reality watching her mother's countenance. She herself experienced a gloomy despondency which she could not shake off; and she also regretted having left London. There she might have heard of Constance: there she might have carried out her design of ensnaring some old lord in his dotage, or some antiquated commoner, into the matrimonial noose, and thus be enabled to indulge in her licentious passion for Francis Paton. But here, in the country, there was by no means the same chance of accomplishing her aims: and as for Francis, she would lose sight of him altogether, and on her return to London know not how to fall upon any clue to his discovery. Thus was it that both mother and daughter felt the gloom of Saxondale Castle strike with a chill to their souls and plunge their spirits into the deepest despondency.

The clock in the tower over the entrance proclaimed the hour of ten, when her ladyship starting from her reverie, pulled the bell somewhat violently. A footman answered the summons; and she desired him to order her maid to attend with chamber-candles. Shortly afterwards Lucilla made her appearance; and as Lady Saxondale rose to issue from the room, she was struck by observing that the young woman's countenance looked pale and agitated. She gazed again: and although Lucilla endeavoured to compose her features, yet Lady Saxondale's keen penetrating eyes could not be deceived by this attempt on the abigail's part to veil unpleasant feelings.

"Is anything the matter?" demanded Lady Saxondale.

"The matter? Oh, no, my lady," replied Lucilla, now blushing and looking very much confused.

"Yes, but I can see there is," cried her ladyship. "Tell me, Lucilla—you need not be afraid to speak—what is the matter? I see that there is something upon your mind."

"Your ladyship would perhaps be angry," said the young woman, still hesitating.

"I have already told you not to be afraid to speak frankly. What is the matter?"

"Only, my lady, I was rather frightened by what I had heard down in the servants' hall——"

"And what is that? Do for heaven's sake make use of your tongue, and let us hear of what nature the gossip is that has so alarmed you."

"Please, my lady, the servants say that last night there was a ghost seen in the western side of the castle."

The reader will recollect that the whole of this portion of the edifice to which Lucilla had just alluded, as well as the extremity that may be termed the back or northern part of the building, had long been disused, but not shut up—for the

rooms which were in those quarters had for years and years past been attended to with the greatest care and shown as curiosities to all guests visiting the castle. These rooms were all furnished in the style of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries: the walls were hung with tapestry, which however was for the most part torn and tattered; and altogether the aspect of those apartments was that of the interior of the ancient mansions which romancists love to describe, and which superstition deems most congenial to the presence of spirits from the other world. Nor must it be forgotten that the chapel was on the western side, overlooking the River Trent,—that same chapel where Lady Saxondale's appointment was kept by Ralph Farefield, but from which he never went forth alive!

At that announcement relative to the ghost which Lucilla had just made, Lady Saxondale gave a contemptuous smile—as did also Juliana. The former was turning away to proceed to her chamber, when the latter said, "Perhaps you will tell us, Lucilla, something more about this apparition?"

The maid hesitated, seeing that Lady Saxondale was moving away: but her ladyship suddenly stopped, and again turning round, said, "Yes—give us the particulars: for it is possible that there may be ghosts with a predatory intent secreted in the castle; and if so, it will be as well to have a thorough examination of the place ere we retire to rest."

"From what I have been told, my lady," answered Lucilla, "it appears that some of the servants went into the tapestry-rooms yesterday to dust them and open the windows. Robert,"—alluding to one of the footmen,—"went into the chapel to open the windows there; and he entered the cloister of tombs. At that moment he thought he heard a door shut; and going back into the chapel, he saw that the door of the vestiary, which he had noticed to be open a few minutes before, was now closed. For the moment he was rather startled: but he opened it, and looked in. No one was there; and he accordingly concluded that it must have been the draught from the entrance of the chapel that had made the door shut. He therefore thought no more of the matter. In the evening he and two or three others of the servants went back to shut the windows again. They had lights with them: for it was then dusk. Having closed the windows in the rooms and the corridor, they passed into the chapel: but just at the instant they entered the place they saw a shape glide into the vestiary. They ran out in a terrible fright; but ashamed of themselves, stopped short in the passage. Then Robert mentioned the circumstance about the door shutting in the morning. They all resolved to go and explore the vestiary together. They did so, but saw nothing. They even opened the door which leads down into the vaults: but I do not think they descended the steps. However, the servants are all full of the idea that a ghost was really seen; and I hope your ladyship will not be angry with me for having felt a little frightened after what I heard—nor yet you, Miss——"

"Angry with you!" ejaculated Juliana: "who can be angry with you, for having told what you heard and what you were desired to tell?"

"It is very ridiculous," said Lady Saxondale, but with a certain air of constraint, and also in a low and altered voice;—"very ridiculous indeed for the domestics to give way to such foolish alarms. No doubt the wind caused the door to shut in the morning, and a shadow frightened the silly creatures in the evening. It would be giving too much importance to the matter to institute any additional search. I shall now retire. Good night, Juliana."

"Good night, mother," responded the young lady: and rising from her seat, she rang the bell for another maid to attend upon herself.

It must not be thought that this interchange of the usual valedictions between the mother and daughter proved that a reconciliation had taken place. They were still as much at enmity as ever: they had not exchanged ten words since they alighted at the castle—and it was only for the sake of appearances that they had thus wished each other good night in the presence of Lucilla.

On proceeding to her apartment, attended by the maid, Lady Saxondale was struck by its gloomy appearance. Not but that it was splendidly furnished, and belonging to what was termed the inhabited portion of the castle, was completely modernized in all its appointments: yet still it was very different from the elegant and cheerful bed-chamber which she was wont to occupy at Saxondale House in London. The deep doorway—the arched windows—the immense chimney-piece—the huge cornices, elaborately carved and inwrought with armorial bearings—struck her in strong contrast with the light, airy, and pleasing architectural arrangements of the mansion in the metropolis. Besides, this apartment was so spacious that although wax-candles burnt upon the toilet-table and a lamp on another table on the opposite side, the remote corners appeared to be enveloped in gloom. But Lady Saxondale struggled hard to throw off the oppressive feeling which sat so heavily upon her; and her pride would not let her make any comment upon her sensations in the presence of Lucilla.

When her night-toilet was completed and the maid was dismissed, Lady Saxondale did not immediately seek her couch. She could not conceal from herself that the ghost-story had made a certain impression upon her. If she had been asked whether she believed in the possibility of apparitions from the other world, she would have scornfully replied in the negative; and even if she had sat down deliberately to ask herself whether she entertained such a belief, the secret response to her own self-put query would have been precisely the same. Moreover, the reader is already aware that she was a very strong-minded woman. But her spirit had been much bent by the incidents of the morning: the terrific excitement through which she had passed had left in its reactionary influence the darkest despondency hovering around her soul; and her reflections in the drawing-room had conjured up memories and associations but too well calculated to increase the depression of her mind. She was therefore peculiarly susceptible of the gloomy impressions made by the antique appearance of the spacious apartment, notwithstanding all the embellishments of modern splendour which under other circumstances would have entirely eclipsed or absorbed that air of sombre heaviness: and in like manner was her imagination, borne down and attenuated as it was, accessible to a superstitious terror.

She did not therefore immediately retire to rest Perhaps, in addition to all that we have just detailed, there were still darker and deeper fears haunting her mind, excited by the memories of the past and the associations of the present. She felt afraid to enter her couch. But at length literally ashamed of her terrors, she said aloud, "This weakness on my part is preposterous!" — and she advanced towards the bed.

But obedient to an irresistible impulse, she stooped down, raised the drapery, and looked under it. No object of alarm met her eyes; and rising up again, she once more blamed herself for her silly fears. But still she had not the courage to lie down; and almost before she was aware of it, she found herself looking into the cupboards, and with the lamp in her hand taking a close survey of the apartment. Even to the dressing-room opening thence, and to a bath-room which lay beyond, did she push her investigation: but still she discovered naught to alarm her.

"Now," she said to herself, "I will lie down:"— but as she again approached the couch, she experienced a vague and deepening terror for which she could not altogether account.

Replacing the lamp upon the table, she stood hesitating in the middle of the room. She caught a glimpse of her countenance in the mirror suspended above the toilet-table, and saw that it was very pale. Her own looks frightened her, and a cold shudder swept through her entire frame. Her glossy black hair was gathered up beneath an elegant cap—a morning wrapper enveloped her superb form—her naked feet were thrust into embroidered slippers— and there she stood in the middle of the apartment, like a grand statue of classic beauty oppressed with a dumb deep consternation which she could not shake off.

"No, no,—it cannot be!" she suddenly said to herself, with the desperate effort of a naturally strong mind endeavouring to cast away the incubus of a terror to the cause of which her proper intelligence could not assent: "the spirits of the departed do *not* walk upon earth! And yet if it were so, the shade of *him* may indeed be supposed to revisit that place——"

But here her thoughts abruptly stopped short, for she dared not pursue their tenure: and then, by one of those inscrutable impulses which sometimes make their influence felt upon the denizens of this world, she experienced a shuddering desire to visit the spot to which she had just alluded and satisfy herself that there was no cause for alarm. Indeed, she began to feel that until she had done this she could not hope to shake off the vague terrors which had seized upon her—much less to pass her nights in tranquillity beneath that roof. And now all the fortitude of this naturally strong-minded woman came back to her aid; and she resolved upon obeying the secret impulse which was every moment becoming paramount above the alternatives of obedience or disobedience. It was growing irresistible!

"If his spirit may appear to any one, it will be certain to appear to *me*," she said to herself. "If so, better meet the apparition at once, than live in constant terror of beholding it draw aside the bed curtains or emerge from the obscurity of some corner in this room. But if not, then shall I indeed smile at the fears which have crept upon me— and they will revisit me no more."

These reflections, to which she could not have possibly been led in the broad day-light, were natural enough at the hour of night, when influences unknown in the sunshine exercise their mystic and indomitable sway. Lady Saxondale hastened to throw on some additional clothing; and taking the lamp in her hand, she issued from the room. She paused just outside the threshold to assure herself that the household had retired to rest and that all was still within the castle—and hearing no sound, she passed onward through the passages and corridors leading to the western side of the edifice. In a few minutes she reached that corridor whence the chapel opened; and here she stopped short suddenly, saying to herself, "The feeling that has brought me hither argues a greater weakness than the vague terror which first gave rise to it."

She was about to retrace her way: but no—she could not. An irresistible impulse urged her on; and in a sort of desperation, she said, "Yes, I will proceed, if it be only to convince myself that I have the courage to do so!"

She accordingly opened the chapel-door; and though it was the middle of summer, the place struck chill to her flesh, lightly clad as she was. She advanced a few paces, and then paused to listen and to look around. All was still—and no object of terror met her eyes. Through the open arched entrance her looks plunged into the cloister: but the light of the lamp did not penetrate far enough to develop in shapely outline the objects it contained: they looked like things darker than the darkness which enveloped them. She glanced towards the vestiary, and a shudder passed through her frame—while her countenance, already pale, grew paler still. But it was not that she saw anything to alarm her: for she did not. The door was shut—and all was silence, and stillness, and immoveability around.

She made a step forward to approach that vestiary; but with another cold shudder—a dread abhorrence for that spot—she turned aside and passed into the cloister. Now she was amidst the tombs, and in the presence of that colossal figure of black marble representing a warrior in complete armour with the vizor closed,—the stone effigy of the founder of the proud race of Saxondale! Her ladyship was not a woman to tremble before this cold inanimate form; and she remained gazing upon it, as it stood there in its life-like attitude with the left hand upon the hip and the right arm extended towards the door. She even felt the proud satisfaction of proving her own courage by lingering thus in that place of tombs and in the presence of that marble man. At length she turned away; and now with a firmer step, a stronger compression of the lips, and a more daring spirit of research, she approached the vestiary. Without hesitation— without even allowing herself to pause, lest her fortitude should fail her—she at once opened the door. As the huge portal moved slowly upon its hinges, the light of the lamp which she carried in her hand threw its beams into the place; and then, with a still unflinching boldness, she crossed the threshold.

But, Ah! how was it that the lamp fell not from her hand?—for at the instant her blood all seemed

to curdle in her veins—the pulsations of her heart stood still—and an appalling consternation seized spell-like upon her. A form in human shape was stretched upon the huge oaken chest wherein the silver plate of the altar and the garments of the priests were wont to be kept in the Catholic period of that chapel's existence. But only for an instant lasted the superstitious nature of her horror:—transient as any human feeling can be, it was succeeded by another though scarcely less fearful species of consternation, as she recognised in that recumbent sleeping figure the unmistakable form and features of Chiffin the Cannibal!

CHAPTER LV.

THE VESTIARY OF THE CHAPEL.

LADY SAXONDALE'S first impulse was to fly—to raise an alarm—and to have the villain arrested: but all in a moment the light of the lamp flashing upon his eyes, awoke him—and he started up. He had slept with a loaded pistol by his side, which he instinctively clutched and presented at her ladyship, so that she still remained petrified with horror: but immediately recognizing her, he lowered the weapon, and giving vent to a subdued chuckling laugh, said in his usual growling tone, "Why, what on earth brings you here, ma'am, at this hour?"

Lady Saxondale, recovering somewhat of her presence of mind, glanced around to assure herself that the ruffian had no companions with him; and perceiving that he was alone, she grew more courageous—so that it was even with a return of her accustomed haughtiness of look and manner, that she said, "Rather should I ask how dare *you* set foot within these walls?"

"For want of a better home at the present," replied Chiffin, as coolly as if there were not the slightest cause for alarm on his own account: and indeed such was his conviction.

"But what is to prevent me from summoning my domestics and handing you over to the grasp of justice?" demanded Lady Saxondale, wishing to ascertain the precise grounds of the man's self-sufficiency: for she could not help seeing that he considered her to be to a certain extent in his power.

"What should prevent you?" he said: "why, several things, to be sure—and I dare say you ain't far off from guessing some of 'em."

"Name them," rejoined Lady Saxondale, abruptly: for the terrible suspicion flashed to her mind that perhaps Madge Somers had betrayed her secret to the Cannibal, although the woman had positively sworn to her ladyship in the morning of that day, at Saxondale House, that she had treasured it closely in her own breast until it was inveigled from her by Juliana—but that to Juliana alone had she ever mentioned it.

"Name them—eh?" echoed the Cannibal. "Well, in the first place, it was rather a rum thing the way that my friend and employer Mr. Ralph Farefield——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, starting as if a viper had suddenly plunged its fangs into her leg: and then she glanced instinctively towards the door leading down to the subterranean vaults.

"Oh! then you didn't know that me and Mr Farefield was intimate?" said the Cannibal: "but such was the case. I should have thought Madge Somers would have mentioned that circumstance to your ladyship. I told her all about it one night not very long ago; and as of course I know she's been in communication with your ladyship, I thought she might have spoke on that subject."

"She never did," observed Lady Saxondale, with nervous petulance. "Do you know why she has been in communication with me?"—and she fixed her eyes earnestly upon the Cannibal.

"Why, I suppose because she saved your son's life that night up at her cottage—for what reason though I never could tell, as I shouldn't have spared him—and that's the truth."

"Yes, yes—you are right," said Lady Saxondale hastily. "That is the reason why the woman Somers asserts a claim upon my gratitude:"—and with a secret feeling of indescribable relief and satisfaction she mentally added, "He does *not* know the secret. Madge has proved faithful."

"Well, but as I was saying," resumed Chiffin, "wasn't it rather suspicious that Mr. Farefield should have met his death in so queer a way? It isn't likely he went down into that vault and drowned himself of his own accord: he wasn't the man to do it—partickler as when the old lord was dead, there was only the bantling betwixt Ralph and the title as well as the estate—and he knowed that I was ready to lend him a helping hand in the matter. But to tell your ladyship the truth, I never had any suspicion that Ralph met his death by foul means—I always thought it was an accident—till t'other night, when I took the little liberty of introducing myself to your ladyship at Saxondale House by the aid of a skeleton key and a crow-bar: for them's generally my letters of introduction."

"And why, on that night, did you begin to think otherwise concerning Mr. Farefield's death?" asked Lady Saxondale, pale and motionless as a statue, but her eyes burning like living coals as she kept them fixed upon the Cannibal.

"Because it struck me when I come to think of it afterwards," replied the man, with a look of sardonic significancy, "that for a lady to have that scent-bottle filled with stupifying stuff was a queer thing enow; and that if she had it, it could only be to use it—and that if she was bold enough to use it, it couldn't be for the very best of purposes. So putting two and two together, and remembering that your ladyship might have had good reasons for putting Mr. Ralph Farefield out of the way nineteen years ago——"

"You dare not throw such an accusation at me!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale.

"Ah! but I do though—and within the last few minutes your own conduct has confirmed the suspicion."

"My conduct?" echoed her ladyship in mingled astonishment and alarm; for she was at a loss to conjecture the man's meaning, but feared that she had unknowingly committed herself.

"Why, the moment I spoke of Mr. Ralph Farefield, you turned round and looked at that door behind you," answered Chiffin, with a still more satanic significancy of look than he had ere now worn. "Where does that door lead to? Down into the vaults. And what have the vaults got

to do with Ralph Farefield? Why, that he was drowned there. And if you hadn't a knowed this, why should you turn round so sudden and in such a guilty manner towards that door?"

"I did not—it is false—it is a mistake!" cried Lady Saxondale vehemently: but horrible distress was mingled with her impetuous excitement.

"Ah! but I say you did though," retorted Chiffin, "and you can't deceive me. If you knowed that Ralph Farefield met his death *there*, you must have had something to do with it; for if you had nothing at all to do with his death, you wouldn't have knowed he was there at all or how he died. That's as plain as possible. The world never knowed it: it was never put in the paper: all that was said was that he disappeared suddenly, and was supposed to have fled the country on account of his debts. But me and some pals of mine discovered him down there—fished him up—and sold him to a doctor."

Lady Saxondale gave an involuntary groan as the hideous, horrible, awful conviction was forced upon her that the deeds of the dreadful man who was in her presence had so mysteriously yet closely linked themselves with circumstances or associations belonging to her own career. Oh! to recall the past! But no: it was impossible. Was she—the proud, the haughty, the brilliant Lady Saxondale—constrained to linger here in discourse with the foulest of foul specimens of humanity? Yes—such was the necessity to which the dark incidents of her life had brought her: and therefore that groan—Oh! it expressed a world of horrible feelings, all conveyed through one deep, involuntary, hollow sound!

"Come, come, ma'am," said Chiffin, with coarse familiarity—and now the patrician lady shuddered from head to foot,—"don't take on so just because we're chatting over past things. You see that some events which happened in my life is pretty near connected with some of your'n. Well, I've fathomed

all about Ralph Farefield's business—and *that* is one reason why you won't attempt to do me a mischief. Another reason is——"

Lady Saxondale started convulsively: it was a movement the abruptness of which, and accompanied as it was by another anguished look, seemed to say, "What more, in heaven's name, can he know?"

"Another reason is," continued the Cannibal, observing the effect of his words, but taking a savage delight in showing the great titled lady how completely she was in his power—or at least how much he considered her to be,—"another reason why your ladyship wouldn't find it convenient to quarrel with me, and why you needn't talk again of calling up the servants, because you won't do anything of the sort——"

"But that reason?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, again speaking vehemently and impetuously: for the anguish she endured was crucifixion itself.

"Why, because as I heard a few days back in London, there was that housekeeper of your's—— There! see how you start again——why, you're as pale as death——"

"Monster!" muttered Lady Saxondale between her set teeth: but her frame was quivering all over, and visibly too.

"What did you say?" growled Chiffin, with a ferocious leer. "Something not over polite, I dare say. But no matter. I'm precious tough, and can bear hard names—'specially when I know the lady which utters them is so nice and comfortable in my power. But as I was saying, there was that housekeeper of your'n, which died so sudden. Was there nothing queer about *that?* It struck me so at the time: for a lady which has such excellent stupifying stuff in her possession, perhaps knows what poison is:—or else, may be, that same stuff poured down the throat, will do the job in a twinkling."

"Enough of all this!" said Lady Saxondale in a low hollow voice. "You *must* know that you are inventing the most detestable calumnies——"

"I'm afeard you would have some trouble to prove 'em so before the beak at the Old Bailey," was Chiffin's cool response. "Why—do you think I've got no eyes? It was but a random sort of a shot that I fired when I talked about the housekeeper—just a suspicion that had been hovering in my mind: but the shot took effect nevertheless—it hit home, and you felt it."

"Enough, I say!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, now stamping her foot with passionate excitement. "What are you doing here? why have you concealed yourself in this place? There is already a suspicion of something rife amongst the servants——"

"Ah! then I suppose I was twigged yesterday by that hulking footman," observed Chiffin, with a coarse laugh. "I rather suspected that he thought he saw something: but I slipped down the steps there, and hid myself. I dare say you think to yourself what a pity it was he didn't draw the bolt and lock me in: but I don't throw away chances like that:"—and as he thus spoke, the Cannibal produced from his pocket his housebreaking implements,—adding, "There's never a door in all England that I wouldn't open somehow or another."

"No matter! Tell me what you are doing here. You must depart. I know you will ask me for gold:"—and Lady Saxondale spoke with feverish rapidity. "Well, I will give you some. Tell me what you require——Be moderate however: for I departed somewhat hurriedly from London, and have brought but slender resources with me."

"Wait a moment," said Chiffin. "After what I know of your ladyship, I needn't be over nice or stop to mince matters about myself. It's all very well to tell me to be off from this place; but how do I know that I shan't be running into the lion's mouth?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the mistress of the castle hastily.

"I mean that as London might be rather too hot to hold me, I trudged off—got a lift down by the coach—and determined to take up my quarters here for a short time. I knowed that half the place was shut up; and wanting a little country air, I thought I couldn't do better than fix my quarters here. It didn't strike me that those flunkeys and ringletted damsels of your's would come to dust and air all the rooms; and so I was nearly being surprised. And I didn't think either, that I should have the honour and pleasure of seeing your ladyship so soon. Howsumever, in one word, whether I go or stay just depends on what they say in London upon a certain business. By the bye, you don't happen to have this morning's newspaper with you?"

"What do you mean? to what is all this to lead?" demanded Lady Saxondale, with less excitement and with more courage than before: for she was getting accustomed to the horror of the present interview.

"Why, I mean is my name mentioned in any queerish kind of way in connexion with a little bit of a job——"

"Ah!" ejaculated her ladyship, recoiling with a dread loathing as the recollection of the barbarous murder on the canal, of which her son had first spoken to her, but of which she had subsequently read, now flashed to her mind.

"Stop! don't go away!" cried the Cannibal, thinking that she was about to beat a retreat. "We hav'n't done our business yet. Will you answer me the question I've put? for the longer you delay, the longer you will be kept here."

"Was that your dreadful work?" inquired Lady Saxondale, gasping with horror as she looked upon the perpetrator of the hideous crime to which she was alluding: for whatever her own guilt might really have been, she was accustomed to contemplate *herself*, and therefore recoiled not from such self-contemplation: but from *another* who was deeply immersed in the blackest iniquities, she did recoil.

"What—the canal scene? Yes: if you must have it in plain terms, it was my business. And let me thank your ladyship for the use of the stupifying stuff, which did me good service on the occasion. They meant to do for me; but I done for them instead. But now, one word. Is there a hue and cry? is it knowed? am I suspected?"

"No—I declare solemnly *no*, if I may judge from what I have heard and what I have read," answered Lady Saxondale. "Your name has never been mentioned in connexion with the deed. But now, will you depart? Say but the word, and I will give you means if you lack them."

"Well, since your ladyship tells me that I am

safe, and that there's no hue and cry, I will take myself off. So if you have got a loose hundred or so that you don't know what to do with, you may give them to me. But mind—I am a good kind of fellow in my way; and so if ever your ladyship has any business you want done, just let me know. I'm always to be heard of at the sign of the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town, London. That's where I used to meet Ralph Farefield years back. A note directed to Mr. Chiffin—you needn't 'squire me—under cover to Mr. Solomon Patch, will be sure to reach me; and as I'm not likely to give up business altogether in my present way, even though I took a public or what not, as I have been thinking of, I shall always be ready to attend to your ladyship's orders. I want some good customers."

A horrible thought flashed through the mind of Lady Saxondale at the moment. Her daughter Juliana, recently become the object of her direst hatred, and in possession of a secret the revelation of which would at any moment create a terrific explosion, cover her with ignominy, and bring down the whole fabric of her plans with a terrific crash,—Juliana might be removed from her path, and before her was a wretch who would perform the deed! But no: Lady Saxondale could not induce her tongue to give utterance to the words which nevertheless trembled upon it; and it was with a strong revulsion of feeling that she resisted the temptation and triumphed over the idea of this new and stupendous crime.

"What is your ladyship hesitating for?" asked Chiffin. "Was you thinking whether there isn't some nice little business I might manage to do? If so, you needn't be nice about it. I dare say you can pay well; and there's nothing I wouldn't do for money. The next time you want to get rid of any body, a flooded vault mayn't be handy; and it would excite suspicion to have another sudden death like that of your old housekeeper. It must be a different sort of game—a knife across the throat, for instance: and as your ladyship's delicate hand mightn't like to do it, this here hand of mine is less particklar."

"For heaven's sake, silence! You are heaping horrors upon horrors!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with an ice-cold shudder shooting through her frame: and again she succeeded in putting away the temptation to commit another crime. "Remain here—and I will fetch you the gold you require."

"Well, be quick then, if you mean me to be off."

Lady Saxondale sped away from the horrible presence of the Cannibal, and stole back to her chamber, with what feelings may be better imagined than described. Opening her writing-desk, she took forth a number of bank-notes and a quantity of gold: but as she was about to leave the room again, she felt so sudden a sensation of sickness and faintness come upon her, that she staggered and almost fell. She sought the toilet-table—filled a tumbler with water—and as the limpid draught was poured down her throat, it seemed to hiss as if passing over red-hot iron, so parched was that throat of hers! Refreshed however with the beverage, she gathered up the notes and gold in one hand, took the lamp in the other, and retraced her way to the chapel, in the vestiary of which she had left the ruffian intruder.

"Here," she said, "take this—and for heaven's sake be gone. If you are found within these walls I could do nothing to save you from being handed over to the grasp of justice."

"Well, you behave handsome enough, and I won't bother you by staying here:"—but as Chiffin spoke these words, he thought to himself that from that time forth Lady Saxondale should prove the source of a handsome annuity for him. "Now, which way do you mean me to leave the castle?"

"Doubtless," answered the lady impatiently, "you are better able to decide that point than I."

"Leave it to me, then. One of them windows overlooking the river is the best plan: for I suppose you don't want me to follow your ladyship all through the inhabited part of the castle down to the front gate?"

"Not for worlds!" cried Lady Saxondale.

Chiffin bade her lead the way with the lamp; and quitting the chapel, they entered the nearest tapestried room. From one of the windows in this apartment the Cannibal lowered himself by the aid of a tree, the trunk of which grew out of the bed of the river itself, and whose enormous branches reached up to the casement whence he now departed.

"Don't forget the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town," whispered Chiffin, as he paused for a moment on the bough to which he had just passed forth.

"No, no," was Lady Saxondale's hurried response. "Away, away with you!"

"All right," responded the Cannibal. "Your ladyship needn't wait any longer:"—and he began to climb down the tree.

Lady Saxondale closed the window, and hastened back to her own apartment. There she sat down in a kind of bewilderment, scarcely knowing whether all that had just passed was a reality or a dream: but gradually as her ideas became collected, her thoughts disentangling themselves from the confusion into which they had been thrown, she shuddered with indescribable horror at the quick retrospection which she cast over her interview with Chiffin. Good heavens! how completely was she in that miscreant's power! With a breath he could destroy her. These were her first and most natural reflections: but as she became still more tranquillized, her view of the subject changed; and gathering courage, she said to herself, "No! Coward, idiot that I was—I should have dared him! Who would believe any accusation from such foul lips as his against Lady Saxondale? The conduct of my whole life, as the world has read it, would give a denial to his averments and stamp them as the most odious calumnies. No: I am *not* in his power: it is ridiculous—it is absurd! And yet I am not sorry, after all," she continued in her musings, "that this meeting has taken place. It is as well to know where such a ready instrument of crime as that man is, may be found. Who can tell how soon I may need his succour? Dangers are gathering around me: I feel that it is so. I feel also that I must either succumb, or else with one bold stroke sweep from my path all who can interfere with my views, coerce, or intimidate me. Yes: it is as well to have learnt where that man is to be found. It is likewise as well to have assured myself that no phantom from the dead haunts the chapel, but that it was a living being of flesh and blood. But, Oh! what a being—what a monster!"

And again did a cold shudder pass through the frame of Lady Saxondale. But she no longer delayed to seek her couch; and though slumber soon fell upon her eyes, yet were the dreams that haunted her of a character to render that sleep but little refreshing.

On the following morning there were all kinds of rumours current throughout the castle. Some of the domestics who had sat up in their rooms awhile ere seeking their beds, had been startled and affrighted by beholding lights glimmering from the windows of the passage on the opposite or western side of the quadrangle; and some labourers who had returned home at a somewhat late hour, their way lying on the other side of the Trent, had also seen lights, from one of the chapel-windows as well as from the casements of the tapestry-chamber next to that chapel. Some portion of the domestics, who were not inclined to superstitious beliefs, put no faith in these statements: but the great majority—of course including those who had seen the lights—were firmly convinced that the western side of the castle was haunted.

When Juliana heard all these things, she smiled contemptuously: for she was no believer in the supernatural. But Lady Saxondale treated the matter in a more serious way,—indignantly rebuking the servants for what she was pleased to term "their silly fears." *She* could indeed well afford to do this, as she had no difficulty in explaining the mystery of the lights which had been seen glimmering from the passage, the chapel, and the tapestry-room on the western side of the castle.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ELOPEMENT.

WE must now return to Constance Farefield, whom we left at the moment she fled so precipitately, closely followed by the faithful Mary-Anne. In pursuance of the rapidly-whispered instructions given by her sister Juliana, she turned into the next street; and there she beheld a chaise waiting, with the Marquis of Villebelle standing near, anxiously expecting her arrival. She flew towards him: some hurried words of endearment were uttered by both, as he caught her hand and assisted her into the vehicle. He made Mary-Anne enter next: then, having given his orders to the driver, he himself leapt in—and the chaise drove away. Quickly did it dash through the streets in the direction of London Bridge—traversing which, it bore the fugitives to the station of the Dover Railway. Fortunately a train was about to start: three first-class tickets were at once obtained; and a fee to the guard procured the accommodation of a compartment entirely to themselves. The bell rang—the doors of the carriages were closed in rapid succession—the shrill whistle blew—and away the train started.

Constance could scarcely believe that it was otherwise than a dream. To be thus emancipated from the rigid coercion of her mother—to be seated by the side of him whom she loved so well—and to have so suddenly as it were abandoned home, the world, the opinion of society and everything, for this one being in whom all her hopes were now centred,—all these constituted a gush of incidents appearing more like a fantastic vision of the night than a positive reality enacted in the broad daytime. But so it was: and Constance, throwing herself into the arms of the Marquis, wept for joy. The discreet Mary-Anne pretended to be looking very hard out of the window at the time; and though the billing sound of kisses certainly met her ears, yet she did not regard the fond embraces in which the lovers indulged.

When the first ebullition of feelings had thus found vent, the Marquis and Constance began to converse upon the plans which the former had already settled and digested in his own mind. So confident had been the hopes held out of the success of the stratagem devised for the emancipation of Constance, that the Marquis had made such arrangements as to permit his prompt departure from London in the manner just described: he had brought his trunks with him, and had taken out the requisite passports for himself, Constance, and Mary-Anne — and therefore proposed that they should make the best of their way to Paris, there to be united by the Chaplain of the British Ambassador. As in a whispering voice he thus communicated his plans to Constance, she listened with fond interest: but when he named the place where this marriage was to be solemnized for the satisfaction of her own scruples, she was struck by something like a presentiment of evil: for she recollected that it was *there* her beloved Etienne had five years back been so mysteriously united to a lady who was yet alive. The Marquis instantaneously comprehended the meaning of that sudden start which Constance gave, and why the colour forsook her cheeks, and why she flung upon him an almost frightened, deprecating regard: but he soothed her fears by the assurance that even if it were the same Chaplain, and if he recollected him, yet that the simple averment that the former Marchioness of Villebelle was dead would be sufficient to allay all scruples.

"And dead she is to me, as she has ever been from the moment of our marriage," whispered the Marquis in his fair companion's ear. "She herself will never claim me—never molest us. We have nothing to fear upon that head. Besides, dearest Constance, the moment our hands are united in Paris, we shall away to Madrid; and many, many years may elapse ere we seek the English shores again."

Now the young maiden's tears began to fall fast. She was reassured as to her transient alarm that their proposed union might experience some obstacle in the French metropolis: but she thought of the prospect of a long, long absence from the land of her birth and the sister whom she loved so well! For Edmund she certainly did not weep: neither had she any tears for her mother, smarting as she still was under the keen sense of Lady Saxondale's harsh conduct: but towards Juliana her mental looks were reverted with mingled longings and regrets. The Marquis of Villebelle understood the meaning of those tears; and fondly did he kiss them away from the damask cheeks down which they were flowing—so that Constance once more threw her arms about his neck, murmuring, "Pardon this transitory weakness! It is not that I repent

the step I have taken. No, no: it is my destiny—and I accept it with cheerfulness."

It was in the middle of the day that the train reached Dover. Totally ignorant as they were of what had ensued immediately after the flight of Constance,—and not for an instant conjecturing that Lady Saxondale had in very spite, as well as in the morbid state of her feelings, quitted London all the same,—the travellers were fearful of pursuit. For might not Lady Saxondale reason with herself that the Marquis being a Frenchman, it was natural enough for him to elope with his fair companion to his own native country;—and they therefore saw that if a chase were really instituted in any direction, it would be in that which they had taken. This calculation had not from the first escaped the Marquis: but he had no alternative in respect to the route he thus took, inasmuch as his diplomatic appointment would be forfeited if he did not hasten to his post. Thus, with the fear of pursuit before their eyes, the travellers determined not to put up at any of the first-rate hotels in Dover, but to procure accommodation at some inferior though respectable tavern, the better to elude any inquiries that in the course of the day might be instituted in the town. For be it understood that they were compelled to remain in Dover until the following morning, there being no more steam-packets to leave during the day of their arrival.

On inquiring at the railway station where they alighted for such a tavern as would answer their purpose, they were recommended to the *Admiral's Head;* and thither did they accordingly repair. For precaution's sake the Marquis had put no name upon his boxes; and thus, beyond mere personal description, there was no very positive clue to their discovery in Dover. As they repaired to the tavern, they settled upon the feigned names which they should adopt while there,—the Marquis taking a French one, and Constance an English one: for as a matter of course they did not as yet pass as a married couple, and the difference of the nations to which they belonged prevented them from representing themselves as brother and sister. Indeed, it was arranged for the sake of delicacy and discretion that Mary-Anne should for the time being cease to be regarded as a mere domestic, but should be treated in the light of the friend of Constance, so that she might sit with them during the day in the same room, and occupy the same chamber with Constance at night.

They reached the *Admiral's Head*, whither the trunks were presently conveyed. The Marshalls received their guests with their wonted urbanity and attention; and while Kate—the handsome, joyous, merry-hearted Kate—conducted Constance and Mary-Anne up to a chamber that they might arrange their toilet after travelling, the Marquis took the opportunity to draw old Marshall aside and intimate to him that one of the young ladies who accompanied him was to honour him with her hand on their arrival in Paris, and that he should be much obliged if no inconvenient answers were given to any inquiries that might possibly be made during the afternoon or evening at the tavern. Old Marshall was thus given to understand that it was an elopement; and as the intimation was accompanied by five guineas which were slipped into his hand, he had no hesitation in promising "that the gentleman and ladies might make sure of his own discretion, and that of his family and servants, in the eventuality alluded to." The Marquis then ordered dinner to be served up presently, and ascended to the sitting-room allotted for the accommodation of himself and his companions.

When Kate Marshall descended into the bar-parlour, she found her father, her mother, and sisters talking of the guests who had just arrived at the house; and Kate was then informed of the intimation which the gentleman had given, and of the handsome present by which it was accompanied. She, in her turn, observed that the young lady with the fair hair was evidently of rank and station, but most amiable and affable—one who in a very few minutes would enlist the sympathies of those who came in contact with her. Thus was it that though perfect strangers to the Marshalls, our travellers had succeeded in making friends of them at once.

While they were yet conversing in the bar-parlour, a tall gentleman, somewhat past the middle age, and handsomely dressed, walked into the tavern, and desired to have a few minutes' private conversation with the landlord. This gentleman had been residing during the summer months at Dover, where he lived in excellent style with his wife and niece. He was a baronet—Sir John Marston by name. He had a florid complexion—bushy whiskers that were nearly gray—and at the first glance a certain frankness of look: but a closer regard would satisfy the observer that in the small gray eye and in the lines about the mouth there were the evidences of cunning and evil passions. The Marshalls knew him by sight, as also by name: but he had never before entered their establishment;—and the request that he made, in a somewhat peremptory way, for a private interview with the old man caused no little degree of astonishment. However, Mr. Marshall of course acceded to Sir John Marston's demand; and conducting him into a private room, awaited farther explanations.

"Do you know," inquired the baronet, glancing towards the door to assure himself that it was shut, "who the gentleman is that within the last quarter of an hour has arrived at your house?"

"What gentleman?" said Marshall, knowing very well who was meant, but not choosing to give a direct response.

"Why, the gentleman, to be sure, who came with two ladies—or I should rather say, judging by their looks, a lady and her maid."

"Ah! I believe we have some guests: but I didn't take any particular notice of them."

"Well, I *did* then," said the baronet: "and I waited in the street to see whether they meant to stay here. I saw a quantity of luggage arrive soon after; and therefore I felt assured that they do propose to remain. Now, it suits my purpose to ascertain why that lady is accompanying this gentleman——"

"I beg, sir," interrupted Marshall, "that you will not attempt any interference with persons in my house; and if you think that I am going to play the spy upon them, you are very much mistaken."

"But I shall reward you well for the service I require of you," exclaimed the baronet, drawing out his purse and new condescending to a sort of familiar and coaxing tone.

"I don't take bribes," was Marshall's bluff reply

for he was straightforward and honest after his own fashion—and having accepted the five guineas from his guest for a particular purpose, he would not have been tempted by fifty from the baronet to betray the confidence reposed in him.

"You surely cannot be so blind to your own interests?" urged Sir John Marston. "I tell you that it is of the greatest consequence to me to ascertain——"

"I beg, sir, that our interview may end here," interrupted old Marshall, in a resolute tone and with determined look.

"Well then," exclaimed the baronet, drawing himself haughtily up, and resuming the demeanour of a superior towards an inferior, "take up this card to the Marquis of Villebelle——for *that* is the real name of your guest, whatever he may call himself here——and tell him that I request an immediate interview. It is for his own interest that I am acting," added Sir John, perceiving that the old landlord hesitated to comply with his request.

"Mind you, sir," responded Marshall, "I don't know whether the gentleman up-stairs is a Frenchman or an Englishman—for he speaks English as well as you do: neither do I know anything about his being a Marquis: but I rather think he is nothing but a plain Mr. So, if you are wrong in supposing that you know the gentleman, you will of course take as final any answer he may send down to you."

"I will," was the baronet's emphatic reply. "This much I promise you. Take up my card."

Still old Marshall hesitated: but after some reflection he thought he had better do the baronet's bidding, particularly as the latter had assured him that it was entirely in the interest of the gentleman up-stairs. He therefore quitted the room where this interview took place, closing the door behind him. On issuing forth, he perceived his wife and daughters looking out of the bar-parlour in evident suspense as to what the mysterious interview could have been about. He therefore at once proceeded to join them, and in a few hurried words explained what had occurred. A rapid consultation was held, for all the Marshalls were entirely enlisted in favour of their guests up-stairs; but it was at length decided that the card should be delivered. Old Marshall was however one of those men who disliked missions of this sort; and he therefore delegated his elder daughter Kate to perform the task for him. This she cheerfully undertook; and with the card in her hand, ascended to the apartment where the Marquis of Villebelle, Constance, and Mary-Anne were seated.

Entering the room and closing the door behind her, Miss Marshall said, "If you please, sir, a gentleman has called who pretends that he knows you. He has sent up his card, and requests an immediate interview."

The Marquis received the card—glanced at the name—and immediately turned pale. Constance, who had anticipated something wrong the moment Kate began to speak, threw an anxious look of inquiry at her lover. The Marquis, having almost immediately recovered his self-possession, hastily whispered to Constance, "Do not be frightened:"—and then turning towards Kate, he said, "Tell me whether the gentleman who gave you this card has asked any questions. Pray be candid."

"I will, sir," responded Kate: and she then proceeded to explain what had taken place between her father and Sir John Marston, not forgetting to state that the former had refused the latter's proffered bribe,—a fact which Kate merely mentioned for the purpose of letting the lovers know that her family entertained friendly feelings towards them, and would rather assist than mar their plans.

"You may tell Sir John Marston to come up," said Villebelle, after a few moments' hesitation.

Kate Marshall accordingly quitted the room; and the Marquis immediately said to Constance in a low hurried voice, as he clasped her to his breast, "You must now prepare for a scene that may perhaps excite you: but acquainted as you are with all the incidents of my past life, there is nothing more that you have to learn——unless it be the names of those individuals—you know to whom I allude—I mean in the affair of my former so-called marriage. Take courage, Constance: there is no power to separate us, if you yourself be firm."

"Oh! that assurance has cheered me!" replied the young lady, with tears on her cheeks, but a smile playing upon her lips.

"And now," added the Marquis, in a hurried whisper, "go and prepare Mary-Anne for whatsoever may happen——I mean in case those revelations with which you are already acquainted, should transpire during the coming interview."

Constance pressed her lover's hand, and glided across the room to place herself by the side of Mary-Anne, who was discreetly seated at the farther extremity: for the apartment was a large one. Almost immediately afterwards the door opened; and Sir John Marston entered the room. Constance threw upon him a quick glance to see whether she recognized him as one whom she had ever met in society: but he appeared a total stranger to her. Then she looked towards the Marquis, and saw that he had drawn himself up to his full height, and with a calm demeanour bowed coldly to the baronet. The latter seemed somewhat excited, although it was evident that he endeavoured as much as possible to conceal his agitation beneath a haughty reserve. Looking back to assure himself that Kate Marshall, who escorted him up to the room, had closed the door behind him, he said, fixing his eyes with significant earnestness upon the Marquis, "It is necessary that I should speak to you alone."

"No, Sir John Marston," replied Villebelle; "whatever you may have to say must be spoken here in the presence of us all."

"Surely," responded the baronet, "you cannot be serious in what you say?"—and he glanced towards the corner where Constance and Mary-Anne were seated.

"I am most serious," returned the Marquis in a firm voice.

"Then perhaps I have laboured under a misapprehension as to the footing on which this young lady"—again glancing towards Constance—"stands in respect to yourself?"

"If the idea you have formed upon the subject be an honourable one in respect to this young lady, it is correct: but if the idea be a dishonourable one," added the Marquis, "it is most erroneous—and I hasten to dispel it."

"It is then as I thought," observed Sir John Marston. "In plain terms, it is an elopement—and

this young lady entertains the hope of becoming the Marchioness of Villebelle."

The Marquis coldly bowed an assent.

"My lord," at once resumed Sir John Marston, "you surely will not compel me to push this unpleasant business any farther? The moment I saw that young lady in company with your lordship, I penetrated the object which you had in view: it was scarcely possible to mistake it:—for the young lady will not be offended with me if I observe that there is something in her appearance and her whole demeanour which to the man of the world at once forbids the entertainment of a dishonouring idea."

"Well, sir, I understand what you mean," said the Marquis. "It occurred to you that this lady is accompanying me to France to honour me with her hand? You see that I am not afraid to speak out. There is no necessity for disguise. It is as you say."

"But is it possible that this young lady," exclaimed the baronet, now becoming as much bewildered as agitated, "is acquainted with certain particulars——your exact position, I mean——"

"She is, sir," responded the Marquis. "From her own lips may you hear the confirmation of my averment, if you choose."

"Then there is indeed no necessity for disguise," quickly observed the baronet. "Madam," he added, advancing towards Constance, "you are aware that you are about to bestow your hand upon a person who is already married—that therefore the ceremony can be but the veriest mockery so far as you yourself are concerned—and that in respect to the Marquis himself it will subject him to the penalties attendant upon bigamy."

Constance felt much distressed at having the matter thus put in so plain and pointed a style; and although it assumed no more serious aspect than it had previously worn to her knowledge, yet it wounded her keenest sensibilities to have it thus submitted in so cold, deliberate, and business-like a manner to her contemplation. But conquering her emotions, she said, "I beg, sir, that you will address none of your observations to me. As a perfect stranger, you have no right to control my actions:"—and then averting her head, she spoke aside to Mary-Anne.

"It is impossible that this affair can be allowed to proceed," resumed Sir John Marston, again turning to Villebelle. "You are already married—and your wife is alive. It was but yesterday I received documentary proof of this fact. Here," continued the Baronet, producing a paper from his pocket, "is a receipt for a certain quarterly allowance which she enjoys, and which receipt was duly forwarded to me by my agent in London. Do you dispute the fact? do you doubt it?" he demanded emphatically.

"I neither dispute nor doubt it," responded the Marquis: "for within the last few weeks I myself have seen the lady to whom you allude. But to show you the value she attaches to the marriage-ceremony which took place between us five years ago, here is the certificate—here also are other documents connected therewith—all of which she spontaneously surrendered up to me. Wishing to be free herself, she has cheerfully done her utmost to emancipate me from the same bonds of thraldom which she threw off."

"Ah! she has done this?" ejaculated Sir John Marston becoming very pale: then, as the colour rushed back to his cheeks with the excitement of rage, he exclaimed, "No, no—I do not believe it! You have possessed yourself by foul means of those documents! Or else they are forgeries which you have prepared, the better to silence the scruples of your intended victim!"—and now he pointed direct towards Miss Constance Farefield.

"Sir John Marston," exclaimed the Marquis of Villebelle, "dare to address me in that language again, and I shall fling the lie in your teeth. Nay, more—you may consider that I do so now. And there is the door. Depart!"

"One word," said the baronet exercising a strong effort over his feelings. "You may possess the marriage-certificate—you may possess other documents connected therewith—but still the marriage remains the same. It is registered at the Ambassador's chapel in Paris; and so long as that record does exist, is the marriage binding and valid—unless indeed a special law should dissolve it. Now, understand me well! I will keep close watch upon you—I will follow you and this young lady whithersoever you may go—and if you dare attempt to obtain the solemnization of a marriage-ceremony with her, I will stand forward to forbid its progress. Ah! I have terrified you now—and you begin to perceive that the matter is indeed more serious than you would appear to think it."

"Oh, Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Constance, now advancing, her hands clasped in earnest entreaty, "wherefore interfere with us thus? Your threatened conduct will amount to a bitter persecution——exposure, disgrace, and ruin will follow ——Oh! sir, I beseech you not to be thus cruel—thus merciless. Join your entreaties to mine, Etienne," she cried, clinging to the arm of her lover.

"No, Constance, I will not entreat," responded the Marquis with firm look and decisive tone. "If Sir John Marston pushes this affair to extremes, he must account to the world—account also to the tribunals of justice——"

"Beware, my lord: you touch upon the threshold of the secret which you have sworn not to betray!"

"A secret, Etienne?" echoed Constance, with a sudden glance of suspicion and reproachfulness at her lover.

"Sir John Marston merely alludes to the names of those who were interested in that marriage," was Villebelle's quick response. "Constance, I have deceived you in nothing. I have told you everything except those names;—and you yourself can tell Sir John Marston the assurance which I gave you—that I honoured the secret in respect to those names—that I deemed it inviolable—and that I did not even betray it to you."

"Let the names transpire if you will," exclaimed the baronet, with ill-suppressed fury: "I will prevent this second marriage at all risks——by heaven, I will!"

Thus speaking, he turned abruptly away—drew open the door violently—and was about to rush out of the room, when he stopped suddenly short, exclaiming, "Ah! have we spies here?"—for he had caught sight of the retreating form of Kate Marshall as she flitted away from the vicinage of the door.

"Spies?" ejaculated the Marquis, disdainfully. "If there be any, they are in your employment."

The baronet said not another word, but hurried down stairs. In the passage below he met old Marshall, to whom he said in an angry voice, "Do you permit your daughters to play the part of eavesdroppers towards your guests?"

The old man made no reply, but turning on his heel, passed into the bar-parlour—and the baronet quitted the house.

CHAPTER LVII

THE MISSIVE AND THE RESPONSE.

It was perfectly true that Kate Marshall had been listening at the door of the room in which the preceding interview took place. It was not through any impertinent curiosity; but because she had naturally apprehended some unpleasant scene: for although Sir John Marston had declared that it was entirely in the interest of the Marquis he had called, yet the shrewd keen-sighted Kate had not failed to observe that the French nobleman (as she now knew him to be) turned pale and looked agitated the moment the baronet's card was put into his hand. She therefore suspected that Sir John Marston's visit was not altogether of so friendly a character as he had wished to make it appear; and having had all her sympathies enlisted to an unaccountable degree on behalf of the lovers, she felt anxious to ascertain the nature of any impediment that might arise to interfere with the consummation of their happiness.

Kate had therefore listened: but as the conversation progressed within that room, it gradually assumed the form of a revelation to herself. Associating certain observations made by the Marquis and the Baronet, with a few circumstances already known to herself, she was enabled "to put two and two together," as the phrase is, and arrive at the solution of a mystery. Thus was it that as she listened she became more and more interested in what was taking place, and likewise found that she herself was being insensibly drawn in to play a part in the drama. The abrupt opening of the door by the baronet caused her to start away like a frightened deer; and not heeding the ejaculation of "Spies!" which burst from his lips, she sped upstairs to her own little private bed-chamber on the highest storey of the house.

In this room the reader has already on a former occasion seen the gay, good-humoured, and handsome Kate Marshall. The chamber was prettily fitted up, and had an elegant French time-piece standing upon a chest of drawers. In the roof was the little trap door of a foot square, kept shut by the very slight and flexible steel spring fixed underneath it. There was also the little tinkling bell—the rail a couple of feet below the trap door—and in a cupboard the food requisite for the beautiful breed of pigeons which Miss Marshall possessed.

Immediately upon entering this chamber, Kate sat down; and taking writing materials from a drawer, together with a manuscript book affording the special initial letter belonging to that particular date, she penned a note; and although to the uninitiated eye it would have seemed a mere jargon more incomprehensible than Egyptian hieroglyphics, we are nevertheless enabled to explain its meaning to our readers. The contents therefore of this billet were as follow:—

"DEAREST FRIEND,—The Marquis of Villebelle is here on his way to France with a young lady whom he proposes to make his wife. Sir John Marston threatens to follow them unceasingly, and forbid the ceremony wherever they may seek to have it performed. From the various remarks let fall by them, and from some few circumstances of your own life which you have on occasions mentioned to me, I have no difficulty in recognizing your husband in the Marquis of Villebelle. What is to be done? or is anything to be done? Has the Marquis spoken truly that you have freed him to the extent of your power? I await your instructions.

"Your affectionate,

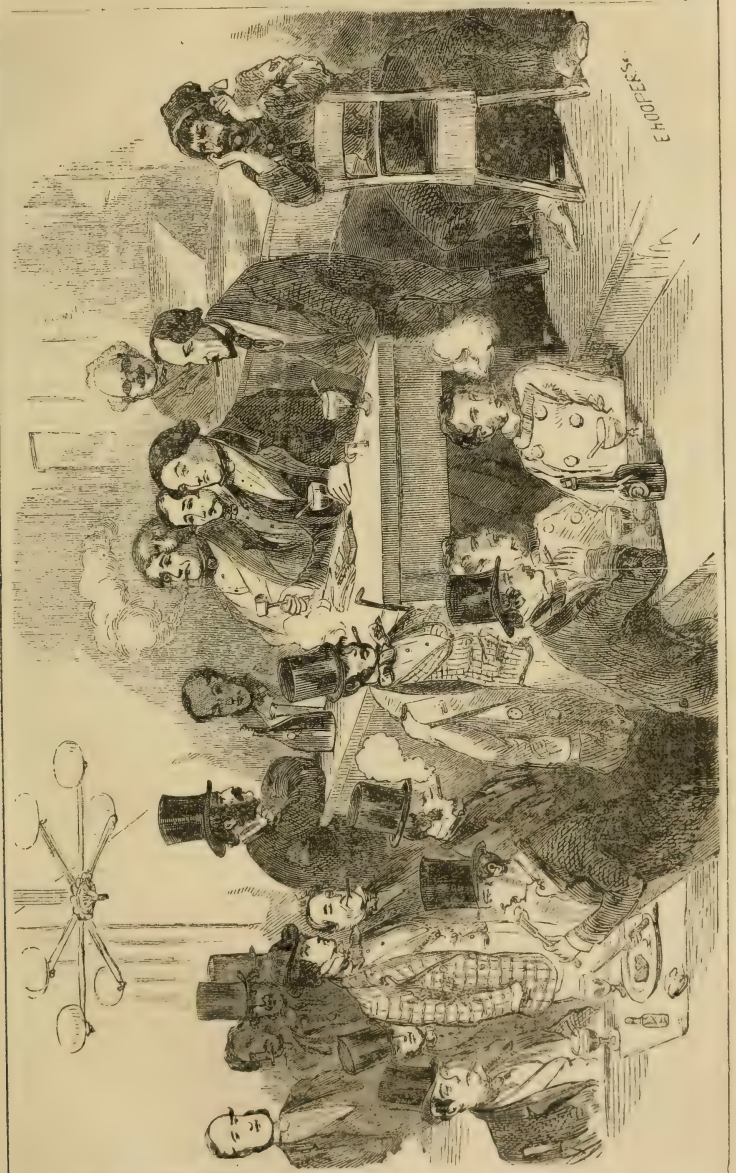
"C. M."

This note was penned in the most minute characters upon the tiniest piece of paper that would possibly serve for its contents. Kate folded it up in the smallest compass—tied a piece of silk round it—and then opening the trap-door, summoned her pigeons in a low, peculiar, but caressing tone of voice,—or rather with certain sweet melodious sounds sent forth from her charming lips. Three or four beautiful doves of the carrier-breed quickly answered her call, and perched upon the edge of the open trap-door. Her selection was promptly made; and extending her arm, the particular bird thus chosen at once hopped upon her wrist. Drawing it in, she closed the trap-door again—addressed the bird in fondling terms—and fastened the little billet under the right wing. Then she put the feathered messenger through the trap-door again. It at once soared up perpendicularly to a great height, so that for nearly a minute she kept it in view through that trap-door of only a foot square; and then she suddenly saw it dart off at a tangent in a north-western direction.

"If my fair friend be at home when the bird arrives," said Kate to herself, as she let the trap-door fly up again, "I shall receive an answer in a little more than a couple of hours."

She then descended to the bar-parlour, where she communicated to her parents and sisters all that she had overheard in the room occupied by her guests—the discovery she had thence made in respect to a certain intimate female friend—and the message she had just sent off by one of the carrier-pigeons. The Marshalls continued to discourse for some little time upon these matters: but it is not necessary to place their conversation upon record.

Meanwhile the Marquis of Villebelle had some difficulty in solacing his well-beloved Constance. The threats of Sir John Marston wore a very serious aspect to her mind. In short, she foresaw that if they were really carried out, they would have the effect of preventing any marriage-ceremony taking place at all;—and that he *would* persevere in his obstructive course, was to be inferred from the resolute tone and manner which he had adopted. But what was Constance to do? She felt that she was too seriously compromised to think of returning home: but on the other hand, if she remained with the Marquis, she feared that it could only be as his mistress. True, the marriage-ceremony could not be really looked upon as valid, if solemnized between them: but it would nevertheless be a means of appeasing her last scruples ere she abandoned herself


EAVESDROPPERS.

completely to her lover. We have already said that she was not so depraved as to be able all in a moment to make up her mind to accept the false and guilty position of a mistress, or to surrender her virtue in the intoxication of passion. Again and again therefore did she ask herself what she was to do; and it was with the utmost difficulty that the Marquis could succeed in tranquillizing her.

He pleaded his love and his honourable intentions—deeply deplored that the latter should stand a chance of being frustrated by the threats of Sir John Marston—but besought that Constance would not think of leaving him. At the same time he declared his readiness to make any sacrifice in order to insure her peace of mind; and he placed his destiny entirely in her own hands. There was a deep sincerity in his words and an earnest tenderness in his manner, that could not fail to make a powerful impression upon Constance. She looked around, and read in Mary-Anne's countenance the course which the abigail would have her follow: namely, to persevere in accompanying the Marquis, and not for a moment think of retracing her way to London. When a woman of no strong virtuous principle, loves deeply,—passionately, adoringly, devotedly loves,—it requires no inordinate strength of argument and no very miraculous combination of circumstances to induce her to consult her own happiness in preference to all other considerations: and Constance was not likely to prove an exception to the rule. Still it was not however without many inward struggles—many impassioned outbursts of grief—many copious floods of tears—many sobs and many sighs, that she at length made up her mind; —and throwing her arms around her lover's neck, she murmured, "Yes, I will be thine—thine under any circumstances: thine now—and for ever!"

An hour had passed since Sir John Marston quitted the room; and Miss Constance Farefield was at length comparatively tranquillized. She had resolved how to act; and thus had surmounted the principal cause of agitation. She had resigned herself to the current of her destinies, and was therefore no longer tortured with battlings and strugglings against the whelming tide of passion which hurried her on. It is true that she had been compelled to stifle the last whisperings of virtuous compunction in her soul; and therefore if she were not altogether satisfied with herself, but was forced to banish farther reflection from her mind, she was at least composed, resolute, and determined.

Kate Marshall now made her appearance,—discreetly knocking at the door, however, before she entered the apartment; for she naturally suspected that the scene with Sir John Marston could have produced no very agreeable effect upon the lovers, especially on the young lady; and she did not wish to surprise them in the midst of tears and the pouring-forth of consolations. She was however immediately bidden to enter; and she was as much pleased as surprised to observe the composed demeanour of the young lady in whom she felt so considerable an interest.

She came to ask if they were ready to have dinner served up; and the Marquis, having replied in the affirmative, said, "By the bye, can you tell me what Sir John Marston meant just now by some ejaculation which he sent forth in respect to spies?"

"I suppose," answered Kate, who, as the reader has seen on former occasions, had a great deal of ready effrontery,—"I suppose it was because I happened to be passing along the landing at the time. But I did not condescend to give any answer to the accusation which that rude man had the impertinence to fling out against me."

"At all events," said the Marquis, with a smile, "I think from what we have seen of you, if you had overheard anything, you would rather render us a service than do us an injury."

"I would—I would," replied Kate, with a degree of emphasis that appeared also to have some deeper meaning in it.

She however immediately quitted the room, but recently returned accompanied by one of her sisters; and the two proceeded to lay the cloth for the repast that was now in readiness to be served up. The dinner was a good one; and although neither the Marquis nor Constance were much inclined to do justice to it, yet this was not the case with Mary-Anne, who failed not to convince the Miss Marshalls that she fully appreciated the culinary merits of the establishment. When she had superintended the placing of the dessert upon table, Kate ascended to her little chamber to watch for the arrival of the feathered messenger whom she expected with the response to the billet borne by her own faithful and intelligent dove.

The beautiful French time-piece on the chest of drawers indicated that two hours and a half had elapsed since Kate despatched the billet,—when suddenly the little bell tinkled—the trap-door sank down—and the expected feathered messenger was received on her outstretched arm. It was not the same bird which she had sent off: that one had been kept to repose itself at its place of destination; —but this was of the same breed and as beautiful as her own. Caressing it fondly, she at once gave it water, and then proceeded to detach the little billet which it bore beneath its wing. The contents of this scroll, as tiny as her own missive, may be thus interpreted:—

"DEAREST KATE,—The Marquis of Villebelle has said nothing but the truth. I do not regard him as my husband. To the utmost of my power I emancipate him from all moral bonds, and would never appear against him to enforce legal ones. If Sir John Marston persists in molesting the Marquis, let him but breathe the talismanic words, '*Lady Everton*' in the baronet's ears, and I shall be much astonished if they do not produce the desired effect.

"Your affectionate,
"E. C."

Having hastily perused this billet, Kate thrust it in her bosom, and then proceeded to administer food to the little messenger that had brought it. When she fancied the bird had eaten sufficiently, she caressed and fondled it for several minutes; and the intelligent little creature seemed pleased to nestle in her bosom, and put up its beak to her lips as if fully sensible that they were charming kisses which came from that rich red mouth. Then she let the bird issue forth through the trap-door, where it rested itself for some time in the little cote containing the saucers of food,—ultimately flying away of its own accord.

Provided with the important intelligence she had received, Kate hurried down stairs,—first of all descending to the room where her parents and sisters

were seated, in order to communicate to them the contents of the missive. They were well pleased at the prospect of the lovers being enabled to emancipate themselves from the tyrannous power of Sir John Marston, whose overbearing conduct had rendered the Marshalls more zealous than at first in their determination to succour their guests to the utmost of their power.

Kate had now a delicate task to accomplish. She had to put the Marquis of Villebelle in possession of the talismanic words that were to clear his path of Sir John Marston's obstructiveness: but at the same time she could give no explanations as how she had become possessed of such important information; for to no one, beyond her own family and those who were necessarily in the secret, did she ever reveal the mystery of the carrier-pigeons. She knew that she must expect to be questioned by the Marquis—but she prepared herself for the proceeding; and with the generous feelings of one who loves to do a kind action, ascended to the apartment where the guests were seated. The moment she entered the room, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary-Anne all three saw by her countenance that she had something of importance to communicate, and that it was of no disagreeable character.

"I hope you will pardon me," she said, addressing herself to the Marquis, "for the liberty I am taking in interfering in your own private affairs: but as you will presently perceive, it is with the very best intentions. In short, I think that I could effectually help you in setting Sir John Marston at defiance——"

"Oh, if this be possible!" exclaimed Constance, rising from her seat and advancing towards Kate with an effusion of gratitude.

"Yes," said the young woman, "I am convinced that you need entertain no farther fear of molestation on his part, if my advice be followed. To tell you the truth," she added, with an arch and roguish smile which displayed two rows of splendid teeth, "I did happen to overhear something of what passed just now: but I declare upon my honour it was only through kind feelings that I listened."

"We will forgive you all that," said the Marquis good-naturedly, "provided that you can really render us the immense service alluded to."

"I can—I will," answered Kate. "I had some such purpose in view when I gave a similar assurance just before dinner."

"And what are we to do? what advice is it that you have to give us?" asked Constance. "Speak, my dear friend—for such indeed you are proving yourself to us."

"A very few words will explain my meaning," responded Kate Marshall. "It is in fact by a sort of talismanic mystery you are to act. Let the words '*Lady Everton*' be simply breathed in Sir John Marston's ear, and he will molest you no more."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed the Marquis and Constance both in the same breath: and then the former immediately added interrogatively, "But what virtue can exist in the mere mention of that name?"

"You must ask me no questions," replied Kate. "Do as I tell you."

"Then are we to understand that you yourself are acquainted with certain mysteries in connexion with the baronet?"

"You are to understand nothing more than what I have chosen to tell you. And now," added Kate, with another arch smile, "your happiness is in your own hands: for I am enabled to assure this lady that she who might perhaps assert a prior claim to his lordship's affection, waives that claim altogether—leaves him free and unshackled—emancipates him to the utmost of her power—releases him from all moral obligations towards herself—and gives a solemn pledge never to appear in a legal sense against him."

As the reader may well suppose, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary-Anne gazed in speechless astonishment upon Kate Marshall as she made these announcements.

"Is it possible then," at length cried Villebelle, "that you are acquainted with her of whom you are speaking?"

"I know her well—intimately," responded Kate. "We were at school together at Southampton—we have frequently met of late years——But no matter: I am not going to enter into any particulars. Suffice it to say that I have put you in possession of a talisman which will reduce your tyrannical enemy to quiescence. And now, the sooner your lordship puts the value of the talisman to the test, the better. Your minds will then be all tranquillized."

"But how are we possibly to express our gratitude to you?" asked Constance, flinging her arms round Kate's neck and embracing her warmly.

"Excellent-hearted young woman that you are," said the Marquis, "we shall never forget you!"

"Who knows but that your lordship may some day or another be able to do me a service?" responded Kate, speaking thus rather for the purpose of escaping from farther effusions of gratitude, than because she really attached any special meaning to her words.

She was about to hasten from the room when the Marquis called her back to inquire where Sir John Marston resided. She mentioned a particular address on the Marine Parade; and the Marquis declared his intention of proceeding thither at once. Kate left the room; and Villebelle, having embraced the now overjoyed Constance, issued forth from the hotel. In the street he saw a person, looking like a footman in plain clothes, loitering about; and it immediately struck him that this was a spy whom Sir John Marston had planted there to watch the movements of himself and Constance. The suspicion was confirmed, when, as the Marquis continued his way along the street, the individual in question followed him. Villebelle however did not show that he noticed the circumstance: for if Kate's talismanic words should prove effective, there would be a speedy end to this espionnage.

The Marquis had to inquire his way to the Marine Parade, being almost a stranger in Dover. He however speedily reached the handsome row of houses fronting the sea, and knocked at the door of the one to which he had been directed. In response to his inquiry, he was told that Sir John Marston was at home; and he was immediately conducted into a handsomely furnished apartment, where the baronet was seated at a table with an open writing-desk before him and examining a number of papers.

"Ah! I presume you are come to signify your

submission?" said the baronet, with a look of ill-repressed triumph, the moment the Marquis made his appearance.

"It may perhaps be otherwise," returned Villebelle drily. "We shall see. Permit me to remark that it must be a proceeding of a strange character that makes it an object of importance to you, even at the present day, whether I contract another marriage or not——"

"Remember our compact, Marquis! Five years have elapsed since the occurrence took place, and you are as much bound to observe it now as you were then. You were to ask no questions—demand no explanations——"

"True," interrupted Villebelle: "but what if things have come to my knowledge without my seeking them?"

"What mean you?" suddenly demanded Sir John Marston, as he started up from his seat: but instantaneously resuming it again, he said in a satirical manner, "You fancy that by throwing out random hints and inuendos of this kind you will terrify me. It is useless. I tell you that I have my own reasons for desiring that there should be but one Marchioness of Villebelle in the world."

"And I tell you in return, Sir John Marston," replied Etienne, "that I will no longer adhere to a compact of so unholy, so unnatural a character. It is monstrous to suppose that I will do so. My necessities were taken advantage of at the time——"

"Yes—you were in that bitter plight that you would have sold your soul to Satan," responded Marston: "but as you have made the compact, so must you abide by it. Now, I do not wish to be on unfriendly terms with you. It is the first time we have met since the marriage took place in Paris. I then promised that I would not lose sight of you; but I have been abroad the whole time until within the last two or three months, during which I have remained in the seclusion of this watering-place. Perhaps, then, I have neglected you—perhaps I have been regardless of my promise: but I am now willing to make amends. Say, do you require money?—for if by preventing this second marriage of your's I disappoint your hopes in clutching the fortune of an heiress——"

"Enough, enough, Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Villebelle indignantly. "You doubtless judge others by yourself. I have no such mercenary motive. The young lady whom you saw just now, has no fortune that she can call her own. But enough, I say, of this parley: it is beneath me to remain bandying words with you here. I give you due warning that if you continue the aggressor, you may perhaps bitterly regret the retaliation it will be in my power to offer. Ah! you seem to doubt me still?"—then after a brief pause, during which he looked Sir John Marston fixedly in the face, Villebelle said, "Perhaps the name of *Lady Everton* may convince you that it is no idle threat which I fling out."

The baronet half started from his seat, but sank down into it again; and falling back in the chair, gazed upon the Marquis of Villebelle in speechless dismay—so that the lover of Constance at once saw that the talisman did indeed possess the virtue which had been ascribed to it.

"How came you to learn this?" asked the baronet in a deep hollow voice: and indeed the effect which the mention of that name had thus produced was even greater than Villebelle had anticipated—for there were the mingled ghastliness and blankness of utter despair in the baronet's countenance.

"No matter—ask me no questions," responded the Marquis, assuming the tone of assurance which would be adopted by one conscious of wielding an immense power over another.

"But she——your wife——does she know all this?" asked Sir John, his manner now suddenly changing into the excitement of the liveliest anxiety and suspense.

"I will tell you nothing," rejoined Villebelle. "Ask me no more questions. Suffice it to say that it is not I who seek to quarrel with you."

"And therefore whatsoever you know you will keep to yourself?" eagerly interjected the baronet.

"Ah, your spy I perceive!" said the Marquis coldly, as he fixed his eyes upon the window, from which happening to glance forth, he beheld the person who had followed him from the vicinage of the *Admiral's Head*.

"He shall watch you no more," the baronet hastened to observe. "I will dismiss him at once. You see," he added with nervous excitement and fawning cringingness, "I am willing to be on friendly terms with you if I can."

Thus speaking, Sir John Marston hastened to the window—tapped at the pane—and made a sign for the man to enter the house. He himself then hastened out of the room to open the street-door and give the individual admittance: having done which, he remained speaking a few moments in the hall with him.

Meanwhile the Marquis of Villebelle had turned away from the window, and walked carelessly across the room, inwardly rejoicing that Kate Marshall's talismanic words should have produced so signal an effect. Passing by the table, his eyes fell upon the numerous papers scattered upon the desk and round about it: and at the very instant he was about to withdraw his glance with the instinctive aversion of an honourable-minded man to pry into secret documents, his looks encountered a name upon one of the papers that at once rivetted them there. All scruples vanished in a moment: he looked closer at the paper—read half-a-dozen lines—and then with an ejaculation of astonishment, turned aside again and advanced towards the window.

The next moment Sir John Marston re-entered the room; and carefully closing the door, he accosted Villebelle, saying, "You will be molested by that person no longer. I have ordered in wine—you must drink with me as a proof that you are not in downright enmity against me."

"Sir John Marston," responded Villebelle, "such words have passed between us this day as to render it impossible that we can sit down together in a friendly manner. I can only repeat, that if it be an understanding between us at this moment that we abstain from mutual molestation, I will adhere to that compact."

"Yes, yes—be it so, be it so!" replied Marston, still labouring under a nervous excitement: and changed indeed was the manner of the man from what it was in its domineering tyranny at the *Admiral's Head*, and from its sneering scornfulness when Villebelle first entered the room where they now stood together.

"I wish you good evening, Sir John Marston," said the Marquis, bowing coldly and moving towards the door.

"One word!—do let me have one word more with you!" exclaimed the baronet, whose ideas were evidently in a state of cruel bewilderment. "Do you know—I beseech you to tell me—do you know where your wife dwells?——or shall I say the lady who was once your wife——for I know not now how to speak of her. Tell me, if you be acquainted with her abode—I beseech you to tell me——"

"Again I say good evening, Sir John Marston:" —and the Marquis of Villebelle, with a still colder and haughtier bow, quitted the room,—the baronet making no farther effort to detain him.

On his way back to the *Admiral's Head*, the Marquis could not help wondering in what consisted the talismanic effect of the mere name of Lady Everton. That it had been potent to quell the proud spirit and level the haughty assurance of Sir John Marston, was evident enough. Nor less did the Marquis of Villebelle ponder upon the extraordinary revelation that had been made to him by the paper at which he had glanced on the desk. Yet this afforded him no clue to the reading of the other mystery: or if for a moment it engendered a suspicion, it was one which there was no other circumstance to confirm. But that the lady whom he had married five years back in Paris, had experienced a strange destiny—perhaps most wrongful treatment —he could not help thinking.

On arriving at the *Admiral's Head*, he gave a quick nod of intelligence to Kate who looked out of the door of the bar-parlour; and she saw that all was well. He rushed up-stairs; and the fervid embrace in which he at once strained Constance, as well as the glow of joyous animation upon his handsome countenance, convinced her and Mary-Anne that there was nothing more to fear.

That evening, after Constance and her faithful attendant had retired to the chamber provided for them, the Marquis sat down and wrote a letter. This he sealed—but placed no address upon it. He then rang the bell, and summoned Kate to the room.

"I have a favour to ask you," he said as soon as she made her appearance. "It is evident that you are acquainted with the lady who, if she chose, might have called herself the Marchioness of Villebelle, but who has so generously released me from all the trammels of that mysterious marriage. Tell me—are you acquainted with her address? I am sure you must be. But I do not wish you to mention it to me: indeed it were perhaps better not. The favour I ask is that you will forward this letter to her."

"I will do so, my lord," replied Kate, receiving the sealed epistle from his hands.

"And now, Miss Marshall," resumed Villebelle, "let me once more express to you my gratitude——"

"Oh! I require no thanks, my lord," she exclaimed. "You have already rewarded my father liberally: and behold!" she added, raising her hand and displaying a beautiful ring upon one of her well-formed fingers: "I have just received this as a memento from that beautiful and amiable young lady who indeed merits all your love. I did not mind accepting the ring, because it is a gift that one might take under such circumstances; and moreover, it was so kindly given. But without the slightest prospect of reward should I have acted just as I have done. I sincerely wish your lordship all possible happiness."

Kate Marshall then quitted the room; and soon afterwards the Marquis of Villebelle retired to his own chamber. On the following day, at about eleven o'clock, the Marquis, Constance, and Mary-Anne, took a kind leave of the Marshalls and embarked on board the steam-vessel for Calais. They experienced no molestation of any kind: nor did it appear that their movements were watched by spies. From Calais the journey was immediately pursued to Paris; and on the day after their arrival in the sovereign city of France, they repaired to the British Ambassador's Chapel to pass through the matrimonial ceremony. The chaplain proved to be the same who had pronounced the marriage-blessing —(what a mockery it was)—upon the Marquis of Villebelle and his first wife. The circumstance of the former marriage was at once remembered by the reverend gentleman; and the Marquis assured him that there existed no impediment to a second alliance. This averment was sufficient,—the social position of the Marquis and the fact that he had recently been appointed to a diplomatic situation at the Spanish Court, being considered ample guarantees for his respectability and honour. The ceremony was therefore solemnized; and Constance now called herself Marchioness of Villebelle.

In the afternoon she wrote a long letter to Juliana, which she directed to Saxondale House, not thinking that her mother would after all have persevered in the originally contemplated visit into Lincolnshire. Early the next morning the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle, attended by Mary-Anne, and by a valet whose services had been engaged on sufficient recommendation, set out on their journey towards the Spanish frontiers; and in due time they reached the city of Madrid without experiencing any more adventures worthy of narration.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE RECREATIONS AND THE HORRORS OF LONDON LIFE.

It was about half-past nine o'clock in the evening, that Lord Harold Staunton, having dined quietly at his own lodgings in Jermyn Street, sauntered forth with his cigar; and passing down the Haymarket, he encountered his friend Lord Saxondale.

"I was just going up to your place, Harold," said the dissipated young nobleman. "I thought perhaps you would want company, and we might make another night of it together——"

"Upon my word, Edmund," observed Staunton, as the former took his arm and walked on with him, "you are wonderfully unconcerned at what took place yesterday."

"Ah! about Constance? Well, what does it matter, so long as she marries the Marquis? Give me a light for my cigar."

"But they say that the Marquis is already married," returned Harold. "I have heard your mother herself say so."

"Oh! my mother will say anything when it suits her purpose," exclaimed Lord Saxondale.

"I suppose she didn't want Constance to marry this Frenchman; and so she invented that tale."

"But if it should happen to be true," said Lord Harold: "what then? Now, to tell you the truth, —no matter what I myself may be, I should be furiously indignant against any one who dared to inveigle away a sister of mine."

"What would you have me do?" demanded Saxondale.

"Why, hasten after the fugitives, to be sure—see that they are really married—and if so, obtain proofs from the Marquis that it is all a calumny about his former alliance: and if he can't or won't give you satisfaction in this way, then you must seek it in another."

"What! shoot him through the head, and so make my sister a widow at once?" ejaculated Saxondale, by no means relishing the advice he had just received. "Come, come, Harold—you know very well that I am no coward: but it would be the height of folly to rush madly into such a scrape as this. Besides, a man who is descended from ancestors in the time of the Tudors, can't place himself on a level with a beggarly French Marquis——"

"But I, Edmund," interrupted Staunton with some degree of bitterness, "though belonging to a family as ancient as your own, put myself on a level the other day with an obscure artist, who could scarcely be called a gentleman—much less a nobleman."

"Well, if you were fool enough, my dear Harold, to let my precious lady-mother hurry you into that unpleasant business, I can't help it. It's no reason why I should be equally imprudent."

"I see that the less we talk upon this subject, the better," observed Staunton. "But wasn't this resolution of your mother's to rush off into Lincolnshire somewhat sudden?"

"It was. But I don't bother myself much about her. Come, what are we going to do to-night? I am in the humour for amusement. To-morrow I have got an appointment with Marlow and Malton about having all my debts paid, and settling about a good monthly allowance till I come of age: so I have every reason to be in the best possible spirits."

"I recollect you told me me how you reduced your mother to submission. You have to thank me for putting you in possession of that secret."

"And so I do thank you, my dear Harold. It was most fortunate, the discovery of that Spanish costume! Ah, you should have seen how queer my mother looked the moment I told her of it. But what are we going to do, I again ask? Suppose we take a look in at the Cider-Cellar."

"With all my heart," responded Harold. "I feel rather dull and out of sorts this evening, and shall be glad of some rational kind of amusement. I am in no humour for getting into disturbances with the police, or losing money at the gambling-table: and therefore I will gladly adopt your suggestion."

The two young noblemen sauntered towards Maiden Lane, in the immediate vicinage of Covent Garden. A lamp over an ample doorway, and bearing the words "CIDER CELLAR" upon the glass, denoted their destination. Descending a spacious staircase, into a region which though beneath the level of the ground, had nothing of subterranean gloom about it, they threaded a well-lighted passage, and entered a large room, which we purpose to describe for the benefit of those readers who may not be as familiar with the place as were Staunton and Saxondale.

Although approached by this subterranean passage, the room itself,—or indeed it deserves the denomination of a hall,—is nearly as lofty as the house to which it is attached, or any of the adjacent tenements. Its length and width are in due proportion with its height; and it has altogether a cheerful and handsome appearance. The decorations are simple, but in the best possible taste. There is a fine mirror at each extremity; and in the evening the place is completely flooded with the lustre of numerous gas-lamps. Three parallel lines of tables run the whole length of the immense apartment; and at the further end a platform is raised for the chairman, the pianist, and the vocalists engaged to contribute to the entertainment of the company. As a matter of course the assemblage is somewhat of a miscellaneous character: for there may be seen the polished gentleman and the consummate snob—the unassuming visitor, as well as the insufferable coxcomb—the well-to-do tradesman and the debauchee aristocrat—together with a pretty tolerable sprinkling of the class known as "gents." But the place is eminently respectable, and is conducted with a degree of decorum which prevents the developments of snobism and gentism from proving a source of general annoyance. On each side of the three lines of table the company are seated; and there is as miscellaneous an assortment of beverages as of guests. Some may be seen drinking wine—others spirits-and-water: others are slaking their thirst with malt liquors, draught or bottled—while others again are expanding into the complacent good-humour produced by peculiar compounds known in that region by the name of "seductives." Some may be seen partaking of suppers, which are served up with most agreeable promptitude after the order is once given, and in a way to tempt the most fastidious appetite. The staple commodity for these little refections appears to be the Welsh-rabbit: but devilled kidneys, scollopped oysters, chops, and steaks, accompanied by baked potatoes, likewise receive considerable patronage. Almost every body appears to smoke at the Cider-Cellar; and it is the sole business of one of the waiters to hand round a box of Havannah's choicest produce. By the way, speaking of waiters, we may add that the attendance is unexceptionable.

At the table on the platform may be seen the chairman with the official hammer in his hand. On his right and left are the vocalists who contribute to the entertainment of the evening. Let it not be supposed that these are mere pot-house singers who give their services in consideration of their supper and their grog: they are of a much higher class, well known in the musical world, and engaged at handsome salaries by the spirited proprietor of the Cider-Cellar. The pianist too is a remarkable character in his way, not merely with the somewhat singular appearance made by his white hair, his coloured glasses, and his black moustache, but by his professional talent.

The entertainment generally commences at about ten o'clock in the evening; and up to eleven there is an almost uninterrupted succession of songs. At this hour the apartment is sure to be well filled;

and a sort of sensation begins to take place. Those who possess watches, look at them with the air of persons who evidently know that some particular treat is at hand; and those who are not fortunate enough to own these indicators of time, anxiously ask the possessors thereof "whether it is eleven yet?" Several of the guests leave their seats in order to get nearer to the platform: Welsh-rabbits and devilled kidneys are suffered to get cold, while the supper-eaters catch the infection of the general excitement and look towards the platform with as much eagerness as if the curtain of a theatre were about to draw up and reveal the scenic attractions of the stage.

The chairman now announces that "Mr. Ross will appear in his favourite character of Sam Hall." Then ensues a tremendous clapping of hands and thumping of knuckles upon the table, so that the glasses all seem as if suddenly attacked with St. Vitus's dance, and even the huge metal jugs of hot water appear inclined to perform a fandango. In the midst of this hearty tumult the vocalist whose name elicited the applause, appears from behind a screen, dressed as a ragged, dirty, wretched-looking man, with a battered hat on his head, a pipe in his hand, and his countenance made up to an expression of a dark, dismal, but at the same time fierce despair. This is the personification of Sam Hall, the hero of the song. He is supposed to be a man condemned to die; and the whole performance constitutes a tremendous illustration of the horrors experienced by the mind of a doomed being. It is no exaggeration to declare that this is perhaps the most terrific revelation of what fancy might depict as passing within the walls of a condemned cell, that it is possible to conceive. All the power of the *artiste* is thrown into the impersonation of his ideal character; and the effect upon the larger portion of the company is immense. True it is that some few individuals, of the snob and the gent class, incapable of being affected by the awful solemnity of the scene, behold only a ludicrous representation therein, and exhibit their vile taste by means of laughter. But with the generality of the spectators the feeling is one of the profoundest awe. Though the performer be chiefly noted as a first-rate comic singer, yet there is no comedy in his personification of Sam Hall: it is all tragedy—deep, appalling, stupendous tragedy. The illimitable horror alternating with darkest despair that he throws into his features, rivets the gaze and seizes upon the mind as if with a spell. The man who is opposed to the punishment of death, beholds in that scene an unanswerable argument in support of his philanthropic views: while the individual who has previously cherished the revolting prejudice in favour of the capital penalty, must, if he have any feeling at all, retire from that scene with a changed opinion.

Such is a description of the Cider-Cellar, and an outline of the entertainments that may be met with there. It was in this place that Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale whiled away a couple of hours on the evening of which we are speaking. Staunton,—who though a thorough rake and an unprincipled profligate, nevertheless had some generous qualities,—was much moved by the impersonation of Sam Hall: but Saxondale, who had not a single kindly feeling, was one of the few that upon this occasion had the bad taste to laugh But then he was not merely devoid of the feeling, but likewise of the capacity to comprehend the deep tragic meaning of the scene.

On issuing forth from the Cider-Cellar, Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale walked slowly on, exchanging their remarks upon all that had taken place. The clock of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, was proclaiming the hour of midnight—much too early for these scions of the aristocracy to think of retiring to rest as yet. They paused in Covent Garden, and deliberated what they should do to amuse or divert themselves.

"I tell you what, Edmund," said Lord Harold, "an idea has suddenly struck me. I was reading in the newspaper this morning something about the low dens and lodging-houses in certain streets at no great distance. What say you?—shall we go and pay them a visit?"

"I don't much fancy it," replied Saxondale: "for I think we are pretty sure of getting into a scrape—perhaps robbed and well thrashed. Not that I am a coward, you know, Harold: but——"

"You like to be safe:"—and there was a tinge of a sneer in Staunton's accents: then he immediately added, "We should want a guide, and might therefore take a policeman with us. There goes one at this moment."

The two young noblemen accordingly hastened after the constable who was proceeding a-head; and he, hearing hasty footsteps behind, quickly looked back. At once recognizing Staunton and Saxondale, who were frequently getting into disturbances with the police, the officer drew his truncheon, telling them "that he knew them well and they had better mind what they were about." This made Saxondale laugh heartily with continuous cachinations of his cracked voice. But Lord Harold speedily convinced the constable that their object was on this occasion pacific. The officer accordingly put back his truncheon; and Staunton proceeded to explain the object he and his companion had in view.

"Well, my lords," replied the policeman, "I am just this minute going off duty; and if you will tell me where you will be in about half-an-hour, I will just slip on a plain coat and hat and come and join you."

Staunton intimated that they would walk about Covent Garden and smoke their cigars. The officer accordingly went his way; and true to his promise, he re-appeared in plain clothes at the expiration of the time specified.

"Now, my lords," he said, "I will take you first of all to a kinchin-ken."

"And what the deuce is that?" inquired Saxondale.

"It's a place where boys and gals live together. It's kept by a woman and her two daughters—a precious rum lot, I can tell you. The woman's a hempen widder——"

Again an explanation was demanded.

"It means, my lord, that her husband was hung. He was a cracksman——that means a burglar——by profession, and one of the most desperate villains that ever lived. It's a matter of ten year ago that he was tucked up; and his old o'oman took to keeping a kinchin-ken. Her name is Burley——Mother Burley they call her. Her daughters ain't the

most moral young women in the world, as your lordships may suppose. They have both got their fancy-men—reglar rum 'uns. Biddy Burley, the eldest, is the blowen of Mat the Cadger; and Polly Burley, the youngest, has Spider Bill for her flash man. These chaps are the greatest thieves in London, and have been a many times on the everlasting staircase——that means the treadmill."

While the police-constable was thus running on with the details of his information relative to the Burley family, he had conducted the two noblemen away from Covent Garden, into a dark, narrow, sinister-looking street leading out of Drury Lane. As they passed along, they suddenly came upon an individual who was leaning with his back against the closed gateway of a wheelwright's workshop, as appeared by the white letters painted on the doors, and on which a light from the window of the opposite house was streaming full. The man leaning there was respectably dressed, and was smoking a cigar. The policeman stopped short, and said to him, "Well, Harry—watching this place still—eh?"

"Yes: and likely to watch it too," was the response. "Uncommon tedious work, I can tell you. But stay—the door's opening!"

As he thus spoke he kept his eyes fixed on the opposite house whence the light was streaming. The constable and the two noblemen looked in the same direction. The light now disappeared from the window: the sound of bolts drawing back and a chain let down continued to be heard for a few moments: then the door opened—and an old man of very sordid and sinister appearance came forth. He threw a glance across the narrow street at the group assembled opposite his door, and gave a low mocking laugh which sounded horrible as a death-rattle. Closing the door, the old man proceeded along the street; and the individual who had been addressed by the name of Harry, at once followed him.

"What's all this mean?" asked Lord Saxondale of the constable-guide after a few moments' silence.

"That place," answered the police-officer, pointing to the dwelling whence the old man had issued, "is a receiving-house for stolen goods; and that old feller is the receiver himself. We call him a fence; and he's one of the sharpest in London. The man Harry that I spoke to and that's gone after him, is an officer of the Detective Force; and he will follow the old fence wherever he goes, no matter how long he may be absent. There's three of the Detectives that's appointed for this special service—to keep watch night and day; and they take their turns. This has been going on for the last five months, and will cost the county a precious sum of money."

"But can't they bring anything positive home to the old man, so as to get him punished at once?" asked Staunton.

"No. Since he's been watched he takes too good care of *that*," replied the constable. "Besides, that's not so much the object—although of course if there was a cause he would very soon be took up. The chief object is to force him out of the neighbourhood, and make him break up his establishment."

"I was not aware that the Police Commissioners possessed such power," observed Lord Harold.

"Power?" echoed the constable. "Bless your lordship, the Commissioners can do anything. And so can us constables too for that matter," added the officer, with a laugh: "for we know very well that the magistrates are sure to take our part, unless it's something very outrageous indeed. But even then there's generally a loop-hole found for us to creep out of. This way, my lords—and here we are."

While thus speaking, the constable had led the two noblemen round a turning into another street of even a more sinister appearance than the one they had just quitted; and they had halted at the door of one of the blackened cut-throat-looking houses that formed the street. The constable knocked at the door: but some minutes elapsed ere it was opened; and during this interval the sounds of numerous juvenile voices reached their ears from within, resembling the uproarious mirth of a school that is breaking up for the holidays.

At length the door was opened by an ill-looking bloated young woman, of about five-and-twenty. Her hair seemed in as much disorder as if she had been creeping through a hedge: a dirty faded cotton-gown hung loosely upon her; and being open in front, left her coarse bosom indecently exposed. She evidently had no stays on, and indeed appeared to have no under-garments of any kind. Her dirty stockings were dangling down; and her feet were thrust into an old pair of shoes trodden at the heels, so that they pattered on the floor like clogs when she walked. She held a candle in her hand—and had a half-tipsy look, as if she had been disturbed in the midst of a revel. She however immediately recognized the policeman: but not the least abashed nor troubled—on the contrary, with immense effrontery—she asked him, with a horrible imprecation, what he wanted?

"Just to show these gentlemen your place, Biddy," replied the constable.

"That's all gammon," answered the woman. "You're arter some of the kinchins——"

"'Pon my honour I'm not," rejoined the officer then in a whisper aside to the noblemen, he said, "You had better give Biddy Burley a tip, my lords."

Saxondale, who was always ready to flash his money ostentatiously, drew out his purse and gave the woman a sovereign, at sight of which her countenance cheered up wondrously; and she said, "My eyes! you *are* swell coves, and no mistake. Come in, and you shall see the ken."

The two noblemen and the police-constable passed into the house, and found themselves in a narrow passage that went perceptibly sloping down towards a staircase at the end. All this time the sounds of voices had continued to be heard in unabating uproariousness. Shouting, screaming, laughing, swearing, singing, and quarrelling, seemed to be going on in every part of the house, as if it were a veritable pandemonium of little demons. Biddy Burley shut the street-door, and throwing open one leading into the ground floor front room, said, "Here's some swell coves come to see the place. But they doesn't belong to the 'Ligious Track S'iety, cos they're smoking cigars and doesn't wear white chokers."

"So much the better. I can't abear them sneaking, snivelling, canting chaps which only comes to see the young gals in bed, and makes a pertence of 'stributing their papers."

This last speech emanated from the lips of an elderly woman of enormous corpulency, and whose immense bloated face, watery eyes, husky voice, and general appearance too well betokened a life of habitual intemperance. She was lolling in a half-tipsy state in a large arm-chair; and the constable, in a whisper to the two noblemen, made them aware that she was the mistress of the den. The younger daughter,—whose appearance so much resembled the elder's that it requires no special description,—was seated next to the mother; and a dozen ragged, dirty, squalid-looking, half-naked boys and girls were placed round a ricketty old table, on which were bottles, jugs, quart-pots, pipes, cigars, tobacco, and cards. The ages of these children averaged from nine to sixteen: vice was indelibly stamped upon their countenances. A few had been naturally good-looking—but it required an almost microscopic eye to discern the traces thereof beneath the grime that masked the features of some, and the bold traits of habitual profligacy, intemperance, and dissipation which characterized others. The room was miserably furnished: the walls and ceiling were so completely blackened with smoke and dirt that the place looked like a sweep's abode; and the crazy boards that formed the floor, sinking beneath the feet, produced gurgling, plashy, slushy sounds, as if the planks rested upon a bed of thick slime and mud. Such indeed, to a certain extent, was the case: for in consequence of bad drainage—or perhaps the absence of all drainage whatsoever—the refuse-water could not flow off and collected in the foundations of the house. The atmosphere was sickly in odour and stifling in heat—it was actually pestilential;—and after merely glancing around this room, the two noblemen were constrained to step back into the passage with the intention of leaving the loathsome den at once.

"You'd better see it all, my lords, now that you're here," whispered the constable. "This scene is nothing to what you'll find up-stairs. Come, Biddy—lead the way and show the light."

The woman accordingly conducted the visitors into a back room, the aspect of which was as horrible as that of the other. Here there was a fire; and a dozen boys and girls, of the same description as the first lot seen by the visitors, were engaged some in drinking and card-playing, and others in cooking things for their supper. Sausages, bits of fish, tripe, and slices of liver were all frying together in one enormous pan: while in a pot—or rather cauldron—cow-heels, more tripe, trotters, chitterlings, and other abominations purchased from the cat's-meat shop, were stewing together. The boys and girls hushed their uproarious mirth (as had been the case in the other room) on the appearance of the two noblemen with the constable. They recognized the last-mentioned individual; and some of them began to what they termed "chaff him,"—giving utterance to horrible imprecations and disgusting obscenities as glibly and as unconcernedly as if these phrases formed necessary integral parts of the English language. We cannot of course sully our pages therewith: but we may record the sense and tendency of some of the characteristic observations.

"Hullo, you Peeler! what d'ye come here for?" demanded a girl of about sixteen, and who though half-naked was utterly unabashed. "If you're looking arter me you'll catch a rum 'un: for I'm blowed if I don't spile that precious face of your'n."

"He don't come for me," said a youth as thin as a skeleton, horribly squalid, and clothed in rags, so that his frightful emaciation was painfully visible: "cos why I've took never a fogle all day——have I though? that's all! No—I'm sniggered if I'm wanted this time."

"I'll tell'ee what, Peeler," said another boy, "if you've come to ax about my karricter I must refer you to the beak which sent me to the everlasting stepper six months ago. Oh! won't he speak a jolly good word for me—that's all!"

"Come, I say, you Polly," cried an urchin of nine, with a face like a monkey, and addressing the officer in a shrill voice, "it isn't me that's in trouble, be it now? You can't say as how I'm a cross-cove, though you chaps does swear to anything. Crikey, how them Pollies does swear——my eye!"

"Don't bully the poor man," observed another juvenile tatterdemalion, who was eating a baked potatoe; "he's a good feller in his way. Here, old chap—have some of this here murphy? It's deuced good, if the butter wasn't rank. Ah! you Pollies doesn't get sich nice things as we does. You 's poor—you be—poor devils!"

"Tip us your mawley, Peeler," squeaked forth another urchin, with a shock of hair like a piece of a carriage-mat; "and let's see that you're not nosing on us. Don't be afeard to come near me—I won't knock yer down, I won't."

"Kim aup, Peeler—what air ye arter here? Tell us, there's a good chap, and ve won't be too 'ard upon yer. But no lies, mind—no lies; or I'm blowed if I'll put aup vith it for one:"—and this was said by the smallest boy in the whole company.

"What'll you give me, you Bobby, you," cried a girl whose age certainly was not above ten, but who seemed amazingly sharp, "if I tell yer how much I got by filching yesterday and to-day. Nineteen ankerchers—seventeen purses—forty-two gold snuff-boxes—and a big lump of cheese."

At this sally of thieves' wit there was an uproarious outburst of laughter on the part of the whole juvenile crew, in the midst of which the visitors quitted the room. But as they ascended the dirty, ricketty, narrow staircase,—still conducted by Biddy Burley,—the shouts of mirth from the back room appeared to follow them, until those sounds were lost in another tempest of uproar which emanated from the upper part of the house.

Biddy Burley conducted the two noblemen and the constable into the front room on the first floor; and there indeed a strange and revolting spectacle met the eye. The floor was strown with rotting rags as completely as a stable is littered with straw or an uncleansed pig's-stye is ankle-deep in filth. There was not a vestige of furniture in the place. A solitary candle burnt in the chimney. The atmosphere was hot and stifling, as well as of the most fetid odour. It struck with a sickly taste to the tongue, and at once produced a nausea and heaving at the stomach. Those who have never visited such a place can form no idea of the loathsomeness of the heavy stagnant air: it seemed to be compounded solely of fetid breaths. The exhalations of putrid fever were nothing to it. And there, in that room, were crowded some fifteen or

sixteen boys and girls, of the same gradation of ages and of the same stamp and description as those previously seen. Some few were stretched upon the mass of putrid rags, sleeping soundly despite the noise made by the others who were awake. These latter were romping and frolicking at the moment when the visitors entered: but they left off to stare at "the swell coves," and then to chaff the policeman. Thus was it that persons of both sexes were accustomed to herd and huddle together in that vile den, each paying twopence a night for the accommodation.

A couple of minutes' survey of the disgusting scene was quite sufficient for Staunton and Saxondale. They experienced a horrible sickness at the stomach; and their very clothes appeared to creep upon them, as if alive with vermin. Biddy Burley offered to show them the rest of the house: but they were quite satisfied with what they had already seen; and Staunton having given her a guinea on his own account for her trouble, the visitors lost no time in issuing from the den.

"Widder Burley and her daughters," said the constable, as they proceeded along the street, "drives a roaring trade with them boys and gals. Why, would you believe it, my lords, she's got at least seventy or eighty of 'em in that house of only six rooms! The whole place swarms with thieves as plentiful as vermin: and it's supported too by thieving. There isn't a morsel of food or a drop of drink that goes into that place, that's bought with honest money. Perhaps your lordships think that it's the only place of the sort? Well, I can tell you there's hundreds of such cribs in London: and *that* isn't even the worst. Down in Whitechapel and over in the Mint, there's worse still. But now, if your lordships like, I will take you into a lodging-house for grown-up people—tramps, thieves, beggars, and what not."

Lord Saxondale at first positively refused the constable's proposal: but Lord Harold, feeling some curiosity on the subject, accepted it, and succeeded in over-ruling his companion's scruples. They did accordingly visit a low lodging-house in the same neighbourhood: but we need not follow them throughout their investigation. A few particulars will suffice. The house was a large one, in the occupation of a ruffian-looking fellow, who had to pay a very high rent to the principal landlord; and in order to do this, he had to make the most of the premises. The original landlord had a dozen such houses, and rolled in his carriage. His tenants being so highly rented, could not afford, even if they felt inclined, to expend any money upon the improvement of the houses: consequently it was not altogether their fault if those dens were of the most loathsome and unwholesome description—with no drainage—no ventilation—and wretchedly supplied with water, which was also unfit to drink. But let us look inside the particular house which the two noblemen visited on the night in question. In every room the lodgers were crowded together. There was a sort of attempt at a distinction of beds, but there were no bedsteads—merely a number of dirty straw mattrasses stretched upon the floor, each provided with one coarse horse-cloth coverlid. These were filthy to a degree, and swarming with vermin. The beds—if they deserved the denomination—had but an interval of about a foot between them; and what with being trodden down and therefore made to encroach even upon that limited space, and what with the coverlids spreading over or tossing about, being kicked off in consequence of the heat, the floor of every room appeared to be completely covered with this wretched bedding. Whole families—consisting for instance of father, mother, and two or three children—occupied one bed: grown up brothers and sisters slept together: fathers and daughters, mothers and sons—all adults—were similarly situated. But we can proceed no farther: the picture is too hideous to be dwelt upon. Those of our readers, however, who have never visited such frightful dens, may rest assured that none of their details are here exaggerated. Indeed, it would be impossible to find any terms sufficiently hyperbolic to transcend the stern reality of the abhorrent truths.

Lord Harold Staunton and Lord Saxondale liberally rewarded the policeman for having accompanied them in these visits: and they made the best of their way, the one to Jermyn Street, the other to Park Lane, to put off the raiment which they had on, and which appeared to cause the most unpleasant sensations. We need scarcely add that these clothes were never worn again, but were given to their valets to be got rid of according as they might think fit.

In our former works especially devoted to the description of the mysteries of London life, we have introduced our readers to low dens of the same description as these of which we have now been writing: but we do not consider that we are to be blamed on the score of repetition or supererogation. We purposely and with studied intent recall public attention again and again to the horrible abodes which poverty is compelled to seek, where vice lurks, and where crime conceals itself. For we boldly and unhesitatingly charge to the account of our legislators and rulers the existence of those sinks of abomination.

CHAPTER LIX.

ELIZABETH AND FRANK.

We must now return to Lady Bess's pretty little cottage in the neighbourhood of Edmonton; and if we peep into the elegantly furnished parlour, one morning after breakfast, we shall behold the amazonian heroine and her brother Francis Paton seated together upon the sofa. Four or five days had elapsed since the youth received the terrible confirmation of Lady Saxondale's averment that his sister was a female highwayman. That during these few days Frank had been very ill, and had suffered much, mentally and bodily, a glance at his pale countenance would show. The colour had completely left his cheeks: he seemed drooping and languid, as if physical exertion were attended by pain; and it almost appeared as if the unfortunate young man experienced a thorough lassitude of life.

His sister, apparelled in the garb befitting her sex, also looked mournful: but with one arm thrown round her brother's neck, and one hand clasped in his own, she was doing her best to console and cheer him.

"Dearest Frank," she said, "it cuts me to the

heart to behold you thus. If you do not endeavour to rally your spirits, I shall myself sink into such deep despondency and gloom as to be utterly incompetent for the final unravelling of this skein, so much of which is already disentangled."

"Elizabeth," answered Frank, fixing his large hazel eyes in deep melancholy upon his sister, "it grieves me—Oh! it grieves me, to be the cause of affliction to you. I am sure, when you think of the past, you must have already enough to make you sad——"

"That is a reproach, Frank," observed Lady Bess mildly but mournfully; "and after all my candour in telling you everything without the slightest reserve, I think you might have spared it."

"Pardon me—forgive me, dearest Elizabeth!" cried Frank, flinging his arms round his sister's neck and embracing her affectionately. "I was indeed wrong to say what I did. Oh, no—I would not reproach you! And now tell me—do you forgive me?"

"It is not for you to ask pardon of me," was his sister's response. "You have never done anything to make you ashamed: whereas I——but I need not say more."

"No, dear sister—we must not dwell upon this topic. That it has caused me pain—great pain—cannot be denied: but for your sake I will endeavour to become cheerful."

"One word more, ere we take leave of the topic," said Lady Bess. "Suppose that when you encountered your sister so unexpectedly a few days back, you had discovered her a lost and abandoned creature in the true sense of woman's ruin, would you not have loathed her?—or if the natural affection of your generous heart had forbidden you to loathe her, yet would you not have been overwhelmed with even a greater amount of grief than you now experience for what I have done? Could you now embrace me as you have just embraced me? would you not feel as if there were pollution in my touch? And remember, Frank, that when woman's virtue is lost, it never can be restored! She may repent: but her chastity is gone for ever. How different is my case! What I have done, can be atoned for. Because, as I have already assured you—although I have been guilty of crimes, yet I have never stooped to frailty. Ah! sometimes it is better to be criminal than frail—at least with woman! I have robbed upon the highway: but I have never plied a loathsome traffic in the public street. Nay, more—although I have been married—yet," she added, while a blush suffused her cheeks and she bent down her looks in modest bashfulness, "I am a pure virgin."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Frank, now with something like enthusiasm in his tone, "I would sooner, my dearest sister, find that you have been what you *have* been, than that to which you allude. Yes—your misdeeds may be amply atoned for: but had you been *the other*, the loss of your honour would have been irreparable."

"And yet, my dear Frank, those were the only two alternatives between which I had to choose at the time," continued Lady Bess, speaking in a low and tremulous voice. "I chose that evil career which had an issue of hope at the end, in preference to that other evil career which at its very threshold is marked by the abandonment of all hope. And now tell me, Frank—can you look upon me with love and affection? or must you ever feel that you blush for your sister?"

"No—after all you have said, I cannot blush for you," replied Frank, warmly. "I may regret and deplore: but there is no need to be ashamed in the one sense in which a brother has to be ashamed of a sister! A thousand times do I rejoice that you chose the alternative of evil which may be remedied, instead of that other alternative which admits of no redemption."

Again did the youth embrace his sister affectionately: and then they sat for some minutes in silence.

Frank no longer wore Lady Saxondale's livery. He was dressed in a genteel suit of plain clothes, and looked a perfect young gentleman. Indeed, if he and Lord Saxondale had stood side by side and a stranger had been asked which was the nobleman, Frank would have been pointed to. The paleness of his looks—the traces of care—and the lingering evidences of indisposition, rendered his appearance even more interesting than it was naturally wont to be; and if Juliana could have seen him now, fervid and impassioned would no doubt have been her longing to strain him to her bosom.

"Do you think that you are likely to receive any intelligence from Lord Everton's man-servant today?" asked Frank, after a pause, and for the purpose of reviving the conversation in another strain from that ere now pursued.

"I hope so," replied Elizabeth. "I know that he calls every morning at the Hornsey post-office to inquire if there be any letters for him: and he has doubtless by this time received the note I forwarded yesterday, telling him that he must lose no time in discovering Lady Everton's abode."

"And then, shall we all three proceed thither together?" asked Frank.

"Yes, my dear brother—without delay. Adolphus is naturally most anxious to embrace his mother: his heart yearns towards her;—and if we receive the desired intelligence to-day, we can set out tomorrow—supposing that her ladyship is really dwelling in some secluded part of Wales."

"Why not denominate her *our mother?*" asked Frank, perceiving that his sister spoke of the subject of their discourse as *her ladyship*.

"Because we have not the positive certainty that it is so," answered Lady Bess. "And moreover, because we have agreed together that we are for the present to say nothing on the subject to Adolphus; and therefore we must be cautious how we speak of Lady Everton, lest he should overhear us."

"But can there be any doubt?" exclaimed Frank. "No—it is impossible!"

"If I mistake not, this morning's post," observed Lady Bess, "will bring us a letter that will go far to confirm our belief in the one sense, or else show us that we have been cherishing a delusion."

"From whom do you expect a letter?"

"Have you forgotten what occurred the day before yesterday, in respect to the carrier-pigeons?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank: "it is then from Miss Marshall that you expect a letter?"

"Yes," replied Elizabeth. "Being all but convinced that Sir John Marston had deeply wronged both you and me, and that our mother's intentions had been flagrantly violated by him, I wrote those

words to Kate Marshall which I showed you, not merely in the hope of being able to serve the Marquis of Villebelle, but likewise as a test of this belief which we entertain."

"I understand," said Frank. "If Lady Everton be really our mother, the bare mention of her name to Sir John Marston's ear, must strike terror to his soul. Is not this your meaning?"

"It is so," replied Elizabeth. "But here is the postman. Sit you still, Frank—you are too weak for any exertion. I will run to the door."

Lady Bess accordingly hastened to receive a packet which the postman delivered; and returning to her brother, she opened it. It was a letter from Kate Marshall, containing an enclosure from the Marquis of Villebelle. What Kate had written ran thus:—

"*Admiral's Head*, Dover.

"Dearest Elizabeth,

"I did not think it worth while to despatch one of our usual messengers merely for the purpose of telling you that your talismanic words fully succeeded in producing the desired effect—because I knew that according to the invariable understanding subsisting between us, you would regard silence as a proof of success. The Marquis departed this morning with the beautiful young lady who is to become his wife. Last night, before he retired to his room, he gave me the enclosed letter, with strict injunctions that it was to be forwarded to you at once. I accordingly send it.

"We are all well, and sincerely hope that you are prosperous and thriving. I received a letter from a certain person the other day: or shall I in plain terms say, from Ned Russell? He was with his ship at Barcelona, but will be home in a few weeks · and then, my dear Elizabeth, as there will be a wedding at the *Admiral's Head*, it will be impossible to dispense with your services as one of the bridemaids. This kindness will be claimed at your hands by your former school-companion and

"Ever affectionate friend,

"CATHERINE MARSHALL."

Lady Bess was in no particular hurry to open the Marquis of Villebelle's letter, as she naturally concluded that it merely contained an assurance of gratitude for the service she had rendered him. Therefore, ere she broke the seal of that letter, she explained to her brother that the Ned Russell alluded to was the individual to whom Kate was engaged to be married—that he was a very fine, handsome, dashing fellow, about thirty years of age—and in every respect well suited for a good-looking, sprightly, gay, and frank-hearted young woman as Kate was.

Lady Bess then proceeded to open the other letter: but as she read its contents, so singular an expression of mingled surprise, incredulity, and solemn awe, appeared upon her countenance, that Frank could not help leaning over her shoulder and scanning the letter also. With its contents however we need not at present engage the reader's attention: suffice it to say that they afforded food for a long and serious conversation between the brother and sister.

This discourse was presently interrupted by the appearance of Adolphus, who now entered the room. A considerable change had taken place in him; and it was all for the better. Not only had his intellects made great progress towards the recovery of their proper equilibrium, but his physical aspect had improved. He was still thin—but the painful appearance of emaciation no longer shocked the eye. A suitable toilet moreover constituted an advantageous auxiliary to this improvement in his looks; and it was not difficult to see that when thoroughly restored to health, he would be a handsome man. His eyes had already lost their vacant bewilderment of regard, and had regained a natural expression. They were dark, and fringed with thick and beautiful lashes. His hair was likewise dark, and curled naturally: his teeth were fine—and the outline of his features, if not completely regular, was at least attractive. He was tall—exceedingly slender, but of good proportions; and now that he was properly apparelled, his air was that of gentility—almost elegance.

It was with the affectionate manner which a brother would show towards a sister, that Adolphus bade Elizabeth Chandos "good morning;" and also with a friendly cordiality that he addressed Frank. At the same time, as the reader has perceived, he had not the remotest suspicion that they virtually and literally believed him to be their half-brother: it was in the sincerest gratitude and esteem that he testified such an affectionate demeanour towards Lady Bess; and this feeling was naturally reflected towards her brother. Lady Bess told him that she expected to see Theodore Barclay in the course of the day with some certain intelligence as to the abode of Lady Everton. Adolphus was rejoiced at these tidings; and Lady Bess asked him whether he felt himself sufficiently recovered to undertake so long a journey as that into Wales, supposing Theodore's belief should prove correct, that Lady Everton was actually residing in some strict seclusion there? Adolphus assured her that he not only felt sufficiently restored to health for such a journey, but that the object for which it was to be undertaken would inspire him with a spirit enabling him to bear up against all fatigue.

While Lady Bess, Frank, and Adolphus were conversing together, they perceived from the window a young lady, neatly and tastefully attired, and leading a charming little boy by the hand, approach the cottage.

"It is Henrietta Leyden!" cried Elizabeth Chandos; and a sudden glow of delight appeared upon the countenance of Adolphus.

There was a knock at the door; and in a few moments Rosa introduced Henrietta and little Charley. At the first glance Miss Leyden recognized in Lady Bess her deliverer who had worn male apparel at the time she effected her rescue: but she did not as quickly perceive that Adolphus was that same miserable-looking object whom she had seen at Beech-Tree Lodge, and who was emancipated from captivity at the same time as herself.

"I thought you had forgotten us," said Lady Bess, taking Henrietta's hand and bidding her welcome. "Do you not recognize our friend here?"

"Yes—now I do," responded Henrietta: and it was with a look as much as to imply her mingled surprise and pleasure at beholding such a remarkable improvement in his general appearance.

"Miss Leyden," said Adolphus, taking her hand, and gazing with a half respectful, half timid admiration upon her sweetly beautiful countenance,—"we were captives in the same place, and I hope that we shall be friends now that we are restored to liberty. Ah! mine is a strange wild history: and you ought to know it. You cannot think how I

have suffered!"—and he pressed his hand to his brow: for though his intellects had almost recovered their equilibrium, yet there were moments when they appeared to totter slightly as if about to fall back into confusion—but then again, with the elasticity of reviving vigour, did they regain the firmness of their position.

"Come with me, Henrietta," said Lady Bess, "for I have much to tell you, and we had better converse alone. This dear little boy is your brother? He shall remain with *my* brother, whom you see here—and also with our friend Adolphus."

Elizabeth Chandos accordingly conducted Henrietta into another room; and there she proceeded to inform her who Adolphus really was, and wherefore he had been kept for so many years in captivity. Henrietta was naturally surprised on learning that it was the real and true Lord Everton with whom accident had thus made her acquainted; and if anything were wanting to augment her indignation against the old profligate who had usurped the title, it was this tale of abominable iniquity towards his nephew which she now heard. Lady Bess likewise explained to her how it was that Adolphus had found his way to her chamber at Beech-Tree Lodge on those occasions when his ghastly appearance so much frightened her; and she wound up her narrative by the intimation that in a very few days there could be no doubt that Adolphus would be enabled to stand before the world as the real Lord Everton.

Henrietta was rejoiced to hear that the cause of right and justice would thus be made to triumph over that of usurpation and wrong; and she remarked upon the extraordinary change for the better that had taken place in the young nobleman's looks.

"You may have perceived," said Lady Bess, "that his reason has nearly established itself firmly upon its seat again, but that there are moments when it quails and totters with a transient feebleness. However, his progress towards a complete restoration to health and intellect is highly satisfactory, and exceeds even the most sanguine hopes that at the commencement I dared form. But now, Miss Leyden, let us speak of yourself. In the first place I have to thank you for complying with my request, that no publicity might be given to the incidents which rendered us acquainted."

"It would indeed have been ungrateful on my part to have disregarded your injunctions," responded Henrietta. "You may even think that I have been guilty of ingratitude, as it is, for suffering so many days to elapse ere I called to renew my sense of the boundless obligation under which I lie towards you."

"Perhaps," said Lady Bess, slowly and with a significant look, "you had some hesitation in coming hither after all you saw on the night of your deliverance?—or perhaps your relations and friends may have counselled you against renewing your acquaintance with me?"

"Mrs. Chandos," said Henrietta, with a tone and look of warm effusion, "you wrong me—I can assure you that you wrong me. Candidly do I confess that the *one* incident of that night—an incident to which I need not more particularly allude—has troubled me much: but I have endeavoured to reason myself into the belief that although you suffered that proceeding to take place, you were no participator in its fruits. Besides, when I thought of the evident superiority of your looks, your manners, your language, I could not suffer myself to remain in the belief that——But I need not be explicit——And now that I behold you in this attire, and that I contemplate the honest frankness of your countenance——No, no—I cannot believe that——"

"And you are right," said Lady Bess: "you must believe nothing injurious with respect to me. There is some little mystery as to my motive in assuming male apparel the other day: but you will not ask me for explanations. It is my secret."

"And not for worlds would I seek to penetrate it," responded Henrietta. "I was about to tell you that I was not very explicit in the account I gave to my mother—and to a good kind friend whom heaven has sent us—relative to the transactions of the other night. At the same time you must understand that it was but *one* incident which I thus suppressed——"

"I thank you, dear Miss Leyden," exclaimed Lady Bess, "for this delicacy and generosity on your part. But do not let me suffer in your opinion, even by the existence of a doubt in your mind as to the particular incident to which you allude. Can you not comprehend that I stood in the position of a general who can only induce his army to assail a fortified town on the express condition that if successful in taking it, the booty shall be their own? You saw that I permitted those men whom I enlisted in the enterprise, to help themselves to whatsoever was in the room where we found you: but I consented not to a general sack and plunder. Now you understand the position in which I was placed: and if I had been over nice, both you and Adolphus would be captives there still."

"I am glad that you have given me all these assurances," exclaimed Henrietta, completely deceived by the sophistry of Lady Bess, whose hand she took and pressed warmly. "As I forbore to touch upon that particular incident when narrating the particulars of my escape to my mother and our friend, there was of course no objection raised to my paying you a visit this day. Indeed, were not my mother an invalid, she would have come personally to thank you; and if I myself have not been sooner, it was because that dear mother's illness, so cruelly aggravated by my unaccountable disappearance, has required all my attention. A little while back we were poor—very, very poor—and dwelling in a mean garret: but now, through the kindness of a gentleman named Gunthorpe, we are in comfortable circumstances and in a healthy abode. Mr. Gunthorpe has taken for us a sweet little residence on Stamford Hill——"

"Ah! you are therefore at no great distance from my cottage?" exclaimed Lady Bess.

"It is but a mere walk," responded Henrietta; "and as my mother was somewhat better this morning, I resolved to lose not another day in visiting you, accompanied by my little brother. Through the aid of Mr. Gunthorpe I am going to open a seminary so soon as my mother is restored to health. Oh! you know not what a kind benevolent gentleman is this Mr. Gunthorpe of whom I am speaking. He will not let us utter a word of thanks for all he does, and is so hasty and impulsive in his proceedings. Whatever he decides upon is done at once; and he appears to be immensely

rich. I can assure you, Mrs. Chandos, that he is somewhat anxious to see you after the account I gave him of my deliverance from Beech-Tree Lodge."

"It is probably that I shall set off into Wales to-morrow or next day—perhaps even this very afternoon," said Lady Bess: "but on my return I will communicate with you."

At this moment the door opened; and Francis Paton, making his appearance, said to his sister, "I wish to say one word to you before Miss Leyden takes her departure."

Lady Bess begged Henrietta to excuse her for a few moments; and wondering what her brother could have to say, followed him into a little back room, where he carefully shut the door before he explained himself.

"What is the meaning of all this mystery, Frank?" asked Lady Bess.

"Just now," responded Frank, "Adolphus suddenly drew me towards the window; and speaking in a low voice, so that the little boy might not overhear what passed, he said, 'There is something in my mind that I can keep secret no longer. I love that sweet beautiful Henrietta Leyden more than I can tell you. I love your sister as if she were *my* sister; but I love Henrietta with a different feeling. The other day I could not understand it: but now I can. For heaven's sake go and whisper a few words in your sister's ear, and beseech her to ascertain from Henrietta whether she loves any one, or is under an engagement of marriage. I dare say, Frank, you will think this very strange, and perhaps very improper on my part: but I cannot help it.'—It was thus that Adolphus spoke to me."

"I am not at all astonished that he should have thus spoken," said Lady Bess. "I knew that he loved Henrietta; and poor fellow! he is a mere child in many respects. His captivity has robbed him of so many years of life's experience: he is therefore the creature of impulses—his sentiments and feelings are in a purely natural state, unwarped and unbiassed by worldly or selfish considerations. I see no harm in allowing this attachment of his to take its course, provided that Henrietta herself is disengaged: for she is evidently a most amiable and artless girl, and no doubt of the highest respectability. Return you to Adolphus, and tell him that his wishes shall be complied with."

Frank accordingly went back to the room where Adolphus was left with little Charley, while Lady Bess returned to Henrietta. Resuming her seat, she took the young girl by the hand; and looking earnestly in her countenance, said, "I am going to speak to you upon a very serious subject. I wish to put a strange question—and I hope you will believe from the outset that it is from no motive of impertinent curiosity. Indeed, I am incapable of such a motive."

"But this question?" said Henrietta, naturally surprised at being thus seriously addressed.

"Tell me—are your affections engaged? or is your heart free?"

"Oh!" cried Henrietta, with a blush of maiden modesty upon her cheeks, "this is indeed a question little expected! But I can answer frankly at once," she continued with a smile: "my heart is altogether free."

"In that case," resumed Lady Bess, her looks showing her satisfaction at Henrietta's answer, "I may at once explain to you my object in putting so strange an inquiry. Instead of keeping a school, Henrietta, you might, if you will, become Lady Everton."

The young maiden was overwhelmed with surprise at this announcement: the colour went and came in rapid transition upon her cheeks. She scarcely knew what to think or what to say. The prospect was brilliant and dazzling; and as it at once suggested ideas of wealth and independence—comfort for her mother, and a happy career for her brother—she felt her brain swim with the intoxication of bliss. But suddenly recurred to her the recollection that she had been an opera-dancer; and in that circumstance she beheld a death-blow to the hope so suddenly and unexpectedly excited in her mind. Lady Bess, watching her countenance earnestly, observed a cloud succeed the glow of animation which had at first overspread those delicately beautiful features; and she said, "Tell me all that is passing in your mind, Henrietta: for on so important a subject there must be no reserve."

"It was natural," responded the young damsel in a tremulous voice, "that I should for a moment feel bewildered as it were with the dazzling brightness of such a prospect: but no—it cannot be! Not for an instant would I prove unworthy of the generous confidence which the true and legitimate Lord Everton has demonstrated towards me. Mrs. Chandos, I have been a dancer in the ballet at the Opera!"

Lady Bess gave no immediate reply, but still gazed earnestly on Henrietta's countenance. Innocence and candour were there; and the blush that suffused her cheeks was not that of conscious shame. The amazonian lady knew full well by her own experience that female chastity may pass through many ordeals and issue thence unscathed: she knew also that woman's virtue may exist under circumstances by no means propitious to its wholesome vitality; and as she still gazed upon the sweetly pensive and softly interesting countenance of Henrietta Leyden, she could read as if through a transparent medium the guileless purity of the young girl's soul.

"It was necessity," she said, at length breaking silence, "which compelled you to appear at the Opera?"

"It was—the direst necessity!" answered Henrietta, tears trickling down her cheeks at the recollection of past calamities. "But you yourself have had sufficient proof that if I had chosen to stray from the path of virtue, I might have been surrounded with luxuries and riches. For what other purpose was I borne to Beech-Tree Lodge and held captive there?"

"No argument is required to convince me, my dear Henrietta, that you are fully worthy of becoming the wife of Adolphus. But on *this* occasion it were better, perhaps, that you should not meet again. You have a mother to consult—and he also will perhaps soon be restored to a parent whose wishes he may have to study. It is sufficient that I have ascertained from your lips the freedom of your heart. I will fetch your little brother to you."

"Yes—your advice is most prudent," said Henrietta, "and shall be followed." She then named

the exact place of her abode, adding,—"Perhaps in a short time you will communicate with me?"

"Immediately on our return from the journey which I believe we are about to undertake: or perhaps I may even write to you from the place whither we are going. But tell me, Henrietta—do you think you can love Adolphus?"

"All the circumstances under which we met, and these which surround him," replied the damsel, with the most ingenuous frankness, "have naturally inspired me with a considerable degree of interest on his behalf. During the interval which has elapsed since the night of our deliverance, I have thought of him with feelings of the deepest sympathy: and now to find myself the object of his affection, is so flattering to me in all respects that—— But wherefore should I say more?"—and she bent down her blushing countenance.

"I understand you, Henrietta," said Elizabeth Chandos. "You feel that you *can* love him—and that is sufficient. Fear not for a moment that the incident of your life to which you have alluded, will stand as a barrier in the way of your happiness. The love which Adolphus experiences for you, is the purest effluence of the heart's natural feelings; and such a love is generosity itself. I will explain to him the particulars of our interview; and I can conscientiously promise that his unsophisticated love will receive no shock from the revelation that necessity compelled you to earn your bread on the stage."

Henrietta Leyden expressed her gratitude for all the kind words that Lady Bess thus spoke; and taking an affectionate leave of her, she departed from the cottage with her little brother Charley.

Lady Bess had no difficulty in making Adolphus comprehend that it was more prudent for Henrietta thus to depart without seeing him again on the present occasion, as the young damsel would require leisure to compose her feelings after an announcement of such importance made so unexpectedly. Adolphus was as docile as a child; and it was sufficient for him to be assured that no circumstances which could be at present foreseen, appeared to bar the confirmation of his hopes in respect to Henrietta.

At a later hour on that same day Theodore Barclay made his appearance; and Lady Bess saw him alone.

"Lord Everton," he said, in allusion to the old usurper whom he still called by that title from habit, "continues very ill, and is confined to his bed. Without being able to speak positive, but only judging from circumstances, it seems to me that he and Bellamy, as well as Mrs. Martin, are still so bewildered they know not what to do: but I overheard Bellamy say to the woman something about *it's being impossible that he could prove his identity.*"

"Meaning of course the rightful Lord Everton?" said Lady Bess. "But to the main point: have you succeeded in discovering the place of Lady Everton's residence?"

"I have not," replied Theodore Barclay.

"Ah, this is provoking!" ejaculated Lady Bess, with a look of disappointment. "Have you no clue?"

"Yes: but not a very satisfactory one. To tell you the truth, I opened a writing-desk where I knew that my old master kept some private papers, thinking that I should be sure to gain thence the information I wanted. But all I could discover was a letter from some solicitors in Parliament Street stating that they had duly made a remittance to Lady Everton, but without saying where she was."

"This is at least a step gained!" cried Lady Bess. "And who are these solicitors?"

"I wrote down their names and address," responded Barclay, as he produced a slip of paper.

"Marlow and Malton—eh?" said Lady Bess, as she glanced at the names: and it struck Theodore that a smile of arch mockery, most delightfully mischievous, flitted over her handsome countenance. "This will do," she continued: "depend upon it I will succeed in discovering the truth. You have not dropped a single incautious word at Beech-Tree Lodge, that may excite suspicion of your being in correspondence with me?"

"I think I am rather too shrewd for that," returned Theodore. "No, no: I see at present on which side my bread is buttered; and I shall stick firm and faithful to you, ma'am, and the interest you have in hand."

"You will act wisely, Theodore. Continue to observe all that passes at Beech-Tree Lodge. But by the bye, you had better call again to-morrow afternoon, as I shall see these lawyers in the morning—and then I can tell you whether I purpose leaving home for a short time, and where letters will find me: for it is important that you should write if anything occurs to render such correspondence necessary."

Theodore faithfully promised to obey Lady Bess's instructions in all things, and then took his departure. It was a sad disappointment to Adolphus and Frank when they learnt that the footman had not succeeded after all in discovering Lady Everton's place of abode: but Elizabeth Chandos bade them not be down-hearted, as she had full faith in her own ingenuity to obtain the desired information from Messrs. Marlow and Malton. Frank, knowing what had occurred between his sister and those gentlemen, looked both alarmed and surprised on hearing that she would now have something more to do with them; but when they were alone together, she succeeded in reassuring him entirely upon the subject.

CHAPTER LX.

MARLOW AND MALTON.

On the following day, at about eleven o'clock, the scene which we now purpose to describe took place at the offices of Messrs. Marlow and Malton in Parliament Street, Westminster. These two gentlemen were seated together in their own private room, which was large and handsomely furnished. One entire side was fitted with book-shelves from floor to ceiling, containing a collection of the most useful and valuable volumes connected with that Dædalian maze of intricacy—the English law. There were Digests of the laws relating to particular matters—Commentaries upon those Digests—and Commentaries on the Commentaries of the Digests—and then the Digests of the Commentaries themselves. There were books of the common law and books of the statutes: and although the collection numbered at least five hundred

volumes, their subjects embraced but some few sections of British legal procedure. A glance at that library could not fail to be followed by the wondering idea on the part of any intelligent man, that a civilized and enlightened people should possess such a jumble of laws and statues, instead of one simple code that might be contained in a single volume. But this same intelligent and observing man whom we are supposing to make such a remark, would *not* wonder that there should indeed be ample food for the whole army of legal sharks, harpies, and cormorants whom these crude, unintelligible, contradictory legislative absurdities have called into being and let loose upon society.

Another side of the spacious apartment which we are describing, was also arranged with shelves; but on these were long arrays of japanned tin boxes, distinguished by the names of the particular clients whose valuable papers required such safe custody. The lawyers were seated at a very large table, with a writing desk on either side, so that they faced each other; and the table itself was covered with bundles of papers tied round with red tape and bearing the usual endorsements in a large bold hand.

This private room was approached through the clerks' office, where seven or eight of these individuals divided their time between the papers on their desk and the sandwiches inside it. Opening from their office were other rooms—one belonging to the managing clerk, another to the cashier, and a third to some other official in the establishment: for, as stated in an earlier chapter, Messrs. Marlow and Malton carried on a very extensive business.

We must however return into the private room where these gentlemen were seated: but we should observe that there was still an inner room, leading out of their own, and which was termed "the parlour"—that being the *sanctum* where they received very aristocratic visitors, or else where one of the partners might transact business with some client should the other partner be simultaneously engaged in a like manner. But at the moment when we thus peep in upon them, they were alone together, discoursing upon their affairs. Presently some one knocked at the door communicating from the outer office; and upon being bidden to enter, a clerk made his appearance. Advancing towards the table, he laid a card upon Mr. Marlow's desk, saying, "This lady, sir, requests an immediate interview."

"Mrs. Chandos!" ejaculated Marlow, bounding upon his seat. "Was there ever such——But no matter. How shall we act, Malton?"

"See her," was his more sedate partner's response.

"So we will," cried Marlow: then turning to the clerk, he said, "Show the lady in."

The young man disappeared; and Mr. Malton said, "Now don't act as if you were so over positive about that identity. You might have been mistaken you know——"

"Mistaken! Pooh—nonsense! Have I not eyes? and must I not believe them? But hush! here she comes."

The door again opened; and Mrs. Chandos—or rather Lady Bess, bearing that name and wearing the costume best befitting her sex — made her appearance. She was very elegantly apparelled; and with her veil thrown back, looked even handsomer than when Mr. Marlow had seen her at Dover at the *Admiral's Head*. The garb which she wore became her splendid shape to the utmost advantage; and though her features might be pronounced by rigid criticism to be somewhat coarse, yet it was impossible to deny that she was a very fine creature. Her hair in its raven richness, set off the high and noble forehead; the large dark eyes, so bright and so unfathomable, gave a wondrous animation to her countenance;—and as she entered, her moist luscious lips, parting in a mischievous smile which she could not possibly subdue, revealed those unblemished teeth of ivory whiteness.

Observing this smile, Mr. Marlow, who had at first looked grave and severe, could not help relaxing from that mood; and then, being suddenly seized with one of those jocular humours which are inspired by the remembrance of ludicrous circumstances, he threw himself back in his chair and burst out into a hearty laugh. Mr. Malton caught the infection—but far more slightly; and the self-styled Mrs. Chandos gave way to such a joyous fit of merriment, that the flute-like tones of her musical laugh must have reached the ears of the clerks in their own office, and made them wonder what hilarious client had just been introduced to the presence of their employers.

"Pray sit down, ma'am," said Mr. Marlow, feeling that it would be almost impossible to resume his severity of look after this virtual abandonment of rancour for the past. "Have I really the honour of addressing the Mrs. Chandos of Dover?"

"Really that honour—if an honour it be," she answered, her gaiety having by this time subsided into a smile of roguish archness, which made her look most wickedly handsome.

"Well, I must confess that I do not know exactly how to receive you," continued the elder partner: "for in my own mind the conviction is still strong——"

"But you have received me with a laugh," interrupted Lady Bess. "Never mind what your conviction may be. I have come to talk upon a business matter—and I beg that the Dover scene may be put out of the question—at least for the present."

"Well, we will try to lose sight of it if we can," ejaculated Mr. Marlow: "but I confess it's difficult enough. And now, what about this business? I hope you do not want me to meet you on the high road to Tottenham somewhat late at night?"

"I will joke with you as long as ever you please," replied Lady Bess: "only when you are really inclined to be serious, perhaps you will let me know."

"Come, let us be serious," said the more sedate Mr. Malton.

"I am quite serious now," exclaimed the elder partner. "Mrs. Chandos, we will put aside the past for a few minutes if you please; and you may continue at once."

"So much the better," observed Lady Bess: and then she added with a smile, "I am sure on my part there is no rancour on account of the Dover affair."

"On your part indeed?" ejaculated Marlow. "No—I should think not. All the trouble and annoyance were on our's. There was I cutting down to Dover, while my partner here rushed off to Liverpool——"

"But I thought," interrupted Mr. Malton, "that we were to forget the past, while this lady spoke to us of the present."

"Yes, yes," said Marlow. "I am sure I do not want to be hard upon the lady, let her be who she may and call herself what she likes. But perhaps," he added with a lurking sneer, "she has come with the honourable intention of paying our costs——I mean the costs incurred in racing and chasing, one of us to Dover and the other to Liverpool."

"Gentlemen," said Lady Bess, now assuming a severe look, "you are carrying your joke a little too far."

"By heaven! it was you who carried the joke too far," ejaculated Marlow: and he took up an ivory paper-cutter and tossed it petulantly half across the table.

"Come, come, Marlow, do be quiet," said Mr. Malton; "and let us see what Mrs. Chandos wants with us."

Mr. Marlow threw himself back in his chair, as if resigning himself to the penitence of keeping silent on a subject which so much excited him; and he waved his hand to his partner, as much as to

say, "Well, you must manage this business whatever it may be; for I see that I cannot help touching on the other affair."

"Now, ma'am," said the more sedate lawyer of the two. "I am quite prepared to hear what you may have to say."

"I must commence by observing," said the visitress, "that I have the honour of the acquaintance of Lady Everton."

"Was it made at night upon the highway?" asked Mr. Marlow.

"Hush, hush!" cried Malton deprecatingly. "Do let us get on, if it's only to save our own valuable time. Well, ma'am," he continued, turning towards Lady Bess, "and so you have the honour of the acquaintance of Lady Everton. What then?"

"You recently made her ladyship a remittance of money to her present place of abode——"

"That is correct," said Mr. Malton. "Be so kind as to proceed."

"Are you not aware that in consequence of one of yourselves, or else one of your clerks, writing the address wrong, your letter of advice was some time in reaching Lady Everton, and that it caused her a great deal of trouble?"—and as Lady Bess thus spoke, it was with so much apparent sincerity of voice and demeanour that it utterly defied suspicion as to the point she was driving at.

"Spelt wrong?" cried Mr. Marlow, springing up from his chair. "No: I will be hanged if it was: for I wrote the address myself—and it's rather too bad to come and tell me that I don't know yet how to spell a name that I have written over and over again every three months for these many years past:"—and thus speaking, he resumed his seat.

"I really do not see wherefore there should be so much excitement upon the point," said Lady Bess, in a tone of gentle rebuke. "I am not here to waste your time in mere trifles. It is by the written request of Lady Everton that I have taken the liberty of calling, for the simple purpose of asking you to be more accurate in future in writing the address of letters intended for her ladyship."

"And pray how the deuce would you have it written?" exclaimed Marlow: then taking a sheet of paper, he pushed it over to that end of the table near which Lady Bess was seated, adding, "Be so good as to show me how you write it, since I must go to school again"

"Or rather," rejoined the heroine, "do you write it, and I will at once point out where you are wrong and how you transpose the letters."

"Very well," said Marlow. "But excuse me for observing that there is a court of appeal even from your learned decision, Mrs. Chandos; and when you have pronounced judgment we will look into the *Gazetteer*."

While thus speaking, Marlow dipped his pen into the ink with an excited, irritable manner, and then wrote down something upon the paper before him.

"Now," he cried, "show me where is the error. I know it is a jaw-breaking name to pronounce: but as for the spelling of it, there can be no mistake."

"We shall see," said Lady Bess: and rising from her seat with a certain fluttering of the heart, she bent over the senior partner's shoulder and looked at what he had written.

The address was *Rhavadergwy, Radnorshire.*

"And that is *not* correct!" she at once exclaimed, by way of sustaining the stratagem to prevent her motives from being suspected. "It should be *Rhavawydery.*"

"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Marlow, quite in a pet; and seizing up the *Gazetteer* that stood amongst other books of ready reference upon the table, he tossed over the pages until he reached the one that he sought: then pointing to the name in the book, he cried triumphantly, "Who is right? and who is wrong?"

"Well, I must confess that *you* are right," said Lady Bess, pretending to look profoundly astonished. "I wonder that Lady Everton could have made such a mistake."

"And I wonder," ejaculated Marlow, "that you should not have taken the trouble to look in a map before you came rushing down here to give us a lesson in the orthography of Welsh names."

"I must sincerely apologise for the intrusion," said the lady: and with a graceful salutation she quitted the room.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing," said Marlow, "that ever I knew. Is it possible that her object was merely this?"

"She could not have any other that I can see," replied Mr. Malton.

Half-an-hour after this incident the door again opened, and a clerk announced "Lord Saxondale."

The young nobleman lounged into the apartment with an air of dissipated languor, partly real and partly assumed; and nodding familiarly to the two lawyers, he flung himself upon the chair which Lady Bess had so recently occupied.

"We expected your lordship yesterday," said Mr. Marlow, with a somewhat grave countenance; "and I remained here on purpose, although I had important business elsewhere."

"Very sorry, but couldn't come," replied Saxondale flippantly. "Up late the night before—champagne breakfast in the morning—and all that sort of thing:"—and here he gave a terrific yawn.

"And I should think that your lordship was up late last night too?" said Marlow drily.

"Yes—up late every night, for that matter. Who the deuce can go and bury himself in bed before two or three in the morning——unless——"

"You may spare any addition to your remark," interrupted Marlow, perceiving that it would have been some flippant indecency. "And now about this list of debts of your's? Lord Petersfield has agreed that they shall be paid; and her ladyship your mother has expressed a similar desire. Mr. Malton and I, having talked the thing over, do not feel disposed to put a negative upon it: but we wish some little explanation about a few of the items, because we are of opinion that a compromise may be effected with the parties in some instances."

"Well, what explanations do you want? I have not much time to spare: for I have got to meet a man in half-an-hour——"

"Meet whom?" demanded Marlow, somewhat sharply.

"Only Staunton," was the response.

"My opinion is that Lord Harold Staunton whom you speak of so familiarly, has done you a world of mischief; and I think, Lord Saxondale, that it you were to see a little less of him, the better. I do not

say that you can cut him altogether, being engaged as you are to his lordship's sister——"

"Now pray don't preach a sermon," interrupted Saxondale, affecting an air of fatigue. "If you wish me to hear one, I will go with you and attend Dr. Dronewell at St. George's, Hanover Square, and if *he* don't send us all to sleep, may I be hanged if I know who will."

"Well, about these debts then," cried Marlow, tossing his head and pursing up his mouth, as much as to imply that there was nothing to be done with such a being as Edmund. "I see here one Musters, represented as holding promissory notes for four thousand pounds. Pray how much have you received in hard cash out of this?"

"Oh! I had the value safe enough," replied Saxondale; "and I don't want any compromise made with him, because he was recommended to me by a young lady of my acquaintance, and it wouldn't look well if it came to her ears that it was a mere dividend affair, and not a regular settlement. She would cut me dead if she thought it was a fifteen-shilling-in-the-pound business."

"And pray who is this exceedingly fastidious young lady?"

"Ah! that's tellings," responded Saxondale.

"A mistress, I presume?" cried Marlow. "That is the way to devour your substance. Look at those tin-boxes. Half of them contain the title-deeds of noblemen's estates, or else mortgage-bonds and so forth; and I'll be bound to say that Woman was at the bottom of all the extravagances of which they are the proofs. But come, Lord Saxondale, you must give us the explanations we require; or we will put our negative upon the settlement altogether. I ask you therefore, how much money in hard cash did you receive from this Musters for the four thousand pounds of promissory notes that he holds? Do be candid; for we shall find it all out."

"Well then, I had three thousand pounds," replied Saxondale.

"Three thousand in hard cash. And what else?"

"A hundred pounds in wine-warrants."

"What have you done with them?"

"The wine was so bad it wasn't drinkable; and so I sold the warrants for twenty pounds."

"To whom did you sell them?"

"To old Musters himself."

"Ah! that's just what I thought," ejaculated Marlow. "The wine never went out of the Docks at all, I suppose?"

"Never. He produced a bottle as a sample; but the first glass was enough."

"He's a very honest man to sell you things at one moment for a hundred pounds, and buy them back the next for twenty. But what else did you get from him?"

"Four hundred pounds in Debentures of the Carribbee Island Gold-Mining and Pearl-Diving Association."

"And what did you do with them?"

"Old Musters told me that they were capital securities, almost at a premium; and so I went to a stock-broker and asked him to buy them. I don't know much about these things—and I was rather astonished when he told me they were not worth eighteen-pence apiece."

"What did you do with them?" demanded Mr. Marlow.

"I did not like to offend old Musters by taking them back, so I put them into the fire."

"The only place they were fit for," observed Marlow. "Well, we have still yet five hundred pounds to account for——"

"Oh! that was for interest, bonus, and so on," exclaimed Saxondale; "and I don't think it was out of the way."

"In plain terms, this Musters has charged you a thousand pounds, *minus* twenty for the wine, for the loan of three thousand for about eight or nine months. Now, we see here," continued Marlow, referring to the list of debts, "items for a carriage and horses—an immense bill at a wine-merchant's—plate and jewellery at a goldsmith's—and a fearful account at a milliner's. What are all these?"

"For the lady who introduced me to Musters," answered Saxondale.

"She took care to be well rewarded for her trouble, at all events. But how happens it that in less than one year you have run up a tailor's bill for thirteen hundred pounds? That would give you a hundred and thirty suits of clothes at ten pounds each."

"Ah! but it isn't all for clothes," responded Saxondale: "there's about seven hundred of it for cash lent."

"Oh! then I suppose this six hundred pounds at a cigar-shop in the Quadrant, is not at all for cigars? If so, one would think you must have kept a whole regiment in tobacco for the last six months. Come, how much of this is money borrowed?"

"About two-thirds," repied Edmund. "But hav'n't you pretty nearly got explanations enough?"

"No—not quite. What are we to understand by this memorandum which states you to be answerable for a friend to the amount of three thousand pounds to Israel Isaacs of Chancery Lane?"

"Oh! that the Sheriff's Officer, you know——"

"We know very well who he is: but who is the friend for whom you are answerable?"

"Why, Staunton, to be sure. And now for heaven's sake have done, or I shall never get away."

"Stop, stop: don't be in a hurry! This business is more serious than any other you can have in hand. There is such a host of tradesmen in the list that it would seem as if all the expenses of Saxondale House fell upon your shoulders; and many of them too are her ladyship's tradesmen. I recognize their names. How can you owe them money like this?"

"Well, if you must know, Lord Petersfield and you have kept me so uncommon short that I have been obliged to run in here and there and borrow an occasional cool hundred, or so, wherever it was handiest."

"Then, I should say that almost every shopkeeper in Regent Street, and Bond Street, and in Piccadilly, have been found handy by your lordship at times?"

"Uncommonly handy," returned Saxondale. "But have you done *now*?"

"I think, Mr. Malton," said Marlow, appealing to his partner, "that we need not enter much deeper into these affairs?"

"The list is indeed much worse than we anticipated," observed Mr. Malton: "but for this once I suppose it must be settled."

The attorneys then intimated to Saxondale the amount of the addition to be made to his monthly allowance until he should come of age; and after another lecturing, which he listened to with sundry yawns and other evidences of impatience, he was at length permitted to take his leave.

We cannot however immediately divert the reader's notice from the office of Messrs. Marlow and Malton: for soon after Edmund Saxondale's departure, the door of the private room was again opened, and a clerk entered to announce that a gentleman giving the name of Mr. Gunthorpe requested an interview. Marlow desired him to be at once admitted; and our old friend bustled into the presence of the attorneys, with his hat in one hand, his cane in the other, and his scratch wig turned the least thing awry by accident. Having taken a seat, he at once said, "I believe, gentlemen, that you are the attorneys of Lady Saxondale?"

"We have that honour," replied Mr. Marlow.

"Then, gentlemen, I request that you will give me your very best attention," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe. "You doubtless read in the newspapers of a duel which recently took place between Lord Harold Staunton and a young gentleman of the name of Deveril. Now, in this Mr. Deveril I experience some degree of interest——"

"I think I once saw him," said Marlow, "at Lady Saxondale's house. Did he not teach the young ladies drawing, or painting, or something of the kind, until he so misconducted himself towards their mother?"

"Stop!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe: "that is the very point I have come about. He did *not* misconduct himself. It is altogether a base fabrication on Lady Saxondale's part——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," exclaimed Marlow, "I cannot permit this language. Her ladyship is our client——"

"And that is the very reason why I have come to you. Mr. Deveril is perfectly incapable of such conduct as Lady Saxondale has represented. She has injured him in two ways—in a pecuniary sense by procuring his exclusion from the houses of her acquaintances, and in a moral sense by damaging his reputation. With regard to the former it is a mere nothing in comparison with the latter. Thank heaven, he is comfortably off through his own industry and other circumstances; and if he were not, my purse would be open to him. But to be injured in the point which is dearest to an honourable man—his character—this is the source of affliction as well as the wrong that is to be vindicated; and if there is justice in England, and it can be obtained for money, William Deveril shall have it."

"Do you mean to threaten her ladyship with an action on Mr. Deveril's account?" asked Marlow.

"Most decidedly," responded Gunthorpe. "It appears to be the only way of vindicating Mr. Deveril's fair fame. I called upon her ladyship; and she refused to make such amends as she ought. I would have allowed the matter to be settled as quietly as possible, so as to compromise her as little as might be: but she boldly stood out. Now, both Mr. Deveril and myself are still averse to taking extreme measures; and therefore I thought I would call and see if you, as Lady Saxondale's friends and legal advisers, would interfere to save her ladyship from the scandal of exposure in a law-court."

"But what counter-allegation does Mr. Deveril make?" inquired Marlow.

"Mr. Deveril declares that her ladyship poured forth in his ears an avowal of love—that she acted towards him in a manner the most indecorous—and that plainly avowing marriage to be impossible, she offered to become his paramour."

"Mr. Gunthorpe," ejaculated Marlow, "it is impossible this discourse can continue. My partner and I have had the honour and pleasure of Lady Saxondale's acquaintance ever since her husband's death—that is, about nineteen years: and if we were asked to point out amongst the ladies of the Aristocracy one who by her exceeding rectitude of conduct, her unvarying prudence, her self-elevation above everything savouring of levity, much more above everything calculated to excite the breath of scandal, we should not hesitate to name Lady Saxondale."

"Appearances cannot always be trusted," observed Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is quite possible that Lady Saxondale may have conducted herself during a long series of years with the utmost propriety: but in this instance it is evident enough to me that she was beguiled by a strong infatuation into the grossest imprudence. I also have as high an opinion of William Deveril as you have of Lady Saxondale. I know that Deveril was incapable of bending an impure look upon Lady Saxondale—much more of daring to offer an insulting overture. It is absolutely in redible. Even before the duel, I was perfectly convinced of his innocence in this respect: but since the duel I have received what I consider to be the fullest corroboration. In a word, gentlemen, the night before that duel took place, he wrote several letters, amongst which there was one to me. I have since read it; and therein he confessed to me that he was deeply enamoured of a young lady; and being so enamoured—enamoured indeed almost to infatuation—it is not credible that he would have made tender overtures to Lady Saxondale."

"All this may be perfectly logical in your estimation, Mr. Gunthorpe: but we cannot see with your eyes. At the same time," continued Mr. Marlow, "I must thank you for coming to call upon us with a view to prevent the disagreeables of a law-suit. It speaks well for yourself; and I am quite ready to confess that although we do not doubt the issue for a minute, we should not like to see Lady Saxondale's name paraded before the country in such a manner. What is it that Mr. Deveril requires?"

"A written acknowledgment of the falsity of Lady Saxondale's accusation: and this he pledges himself he will only exhibit in those quarters where he has reason to believe the calumny has been propagated. I should have called upon you ere this, had it not been for the duel which has stretched my poor young friend Deveril upon his bed: so that I lost all thought of everything except his danger. Now he is approaching convalescence, and it is time to adopt measures to clear his character."

"You are aware perhaps that Lady Saxondale has left town, and that she is plunged into the deepest grief on account of her youngest daughter Miss Constance Farefield—or rather I suppose," added Marlow, "the Marchioness of Villebelle, as she must

be now: that is to say, if the Marquis were really in a condition to take a second——But no matter. Lady Saxondale, I was observing, has her troubles: her son is a source of annoyance to her; and the sudden death of a faithful old servant, which happened the other day, has likewise contributed to her sorrow. Now, I will appeal to you, Mr. Gunthorpe, whether you will increase her ladyship's vexations by assailing her character through the medium of a law-court?"

"Much as I regret the misfortunes of others, I cannot consent that their offences should be glossed over. Mr. Deveril's character must be vindicated. State how many days you require for reflection upon the subject, or to communicate with her ladyship, and the delay shall be granted. But if at the end of that interval nothing satisfactory is done, then I am determined that my attorney shall at once take the necessary steps on Mr. Deveril's behalf. And I warn you that we are not without evidence——"

But here Mr. Gunthorpe stopped short.

"We had better talk it over, Marlow," suggested Mr. Malton: "and therefore let us request Mr. Gunthorpe to suffer the matter to remain in abeyance for one week."

"With all my heart," responded the old gentleman: and making his bow, he forthwith took his departure.

CHAPTER LXI

HUSBAND-HUNTING

TURN we now again to Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire.

Lady Saxondale and Juliana were seated at breakfast a few days after their arrival; and if there were not a positive friendliness, there was at all events a less chilling reserve than there lately had been between them. As for love or affection, those bonds were completely broken, never to be united; and as for filial respect on the part of the young lady towards her mother, that was likewise a sentiment which could never have existence again. To suit their own purposes—and indeed to disarm each other of the malignant spite which, if given vent to, would work reciprocal mischief—they had agreed upon a sort of peace. The overtures had not proceeded from one more than from the other: but they had both felt that they could not possibly live longer upon such terms—a freezing silence when alone together, and the simulation of a friendly discourse in the presence of the domestics. They had both alike calculated the folly and danger of maintaining a rancorous enmity against each other; and they knew too much of one another's secrets not to feel that it was better to come to an understanding in respect to the future. Thus was it that on this particular morning, shortly after they met at the breakfast-table, they looked at each other; and the glances they exchanged, showed them that each had come to the same resolution, and that so far as reconcilement was possible it ought to take place.

"I know what is passing in your mind," said Lady Saxondale.

"And you are entertaining precisely the same thoughts, mother," was the answer.

"You feel that we cannot go on thus?"

"It is precisely what you are feeling also."

"And you therefore think," said her ladyship, "that we had better come to an understanding?"

"My views in this respect," was Juliana's rejoinder, "are identical with your own."

"You mean to stipulate," said Lady Saxondale, "for perfect liberty to act as you choose, and to be free from maternal control?"

"And you on your part," said Juliana, "will pursue your own course after your own fashion?"

"Then, whatever I may know of you, shall be the same as if not known at all."

"And your secret shall not escape my lips. There shall be no prying into each other's affairs—no accusations, and therefore no recriminations."

"That is exactly what I should propose," responded the mother. "But if you would allow me to offer you my advice, Juliana, you would marry at the very first opportunity. Indeed, the sooner the better—for fear that your amour with Francis Paton should be followed by certain consequences."

"Such is my intention," returned Juliana; "and for particular reasons of my own, I shall endeavour to find either a very old, doting, but wealthy husband—or else some country squire, who has more money than brains, and will think too much of his horses and his hounds to devote any particular attention to the proceedings of his wife."

"You will scarcely find it difficult to pick up such a husband as this in Lincolnshire. There is Mr. Hawkshaw of Hawkshaw Hall—a fine, dashing country squire——"

"Thank you for the hint, mother. I remember him well: he has known me since I was a girl. And by the bye, he is very intimate with the Denisons, where we are going to-night. You have told me what you would advise me to do," continued Juliana, after a pause, "and I on my part should counsel you to get that woman——what is her name?——Madge Somers, as they call her——out of the country as soon as you can."

"It is already done," responded Lady Saxondale. "The other morning, when she came to Park Lane, I gave her five hundred guineas, on condition that she would at once depart for America—with the promise that on her arrival in New York, if she wrote to let me know she was there, I would despatch her a like sum."

"You have acted prudently," observed Juliana. "I only hope that she has sailed. Doubtless she has plenty of money with her: for that was not the first sum you had given her?"

"No: I had previously given her money. Do you know what that woman's mania was? She told me. It was gambling."

"Gambling! a woman?" ejaculated Juliana, in surprise.

"Yes. From what she said, there is some low place in London frequented only by female gamesters—and she was one. She always lost, and yet could not abandon the habit. To gratify her propensity she lived in that hovel where you found her, and was always clothed in a sordid and wretched garb. But enough concerning the wretch. You and I have come to a certain understanding, and let us adhere to it."

"It is my intention," responded Juliana. "And now, since we appear to be growing a little more communicative than we have lately been, would you

like to know what that letter contained which I received yesterday morning, re-directed from Park Lane?"

Lady Saxondale hesitated for a moment—and then said, "Yes."

"It was from Constance," replied Juliana. "She and the Marquis were married in Paris, and at once proceeded on their way to Madrid, where he has obtained a good diplomatic appointment."

Whether Lady Saxondale would have given any response to this information, we know not: for at the moment the door opened, and a domestic entered bearing a letter, which the postman had just brought over from Gainsborough. Her ladyship, at once recognizing the handwriting of Mr. Marlow, opened it: but she had not read many lines before a look of annoyance gathered upon her features. She however commanded her feelings, and quickly composed her countenance: then, having perused the letter, she folded it up and continued her breakfast. Juliana saw that it was something unpleasant which the epistle contained: but as her mother gave no explanation, she did not seek it—the understanding being that they were not to pry into each other's affairs.

After breakfast Lady Saxondale shut herself up in her own chamber, and pondered long and painfully upon Mr. Marlow's letter. It contained, as the reader has no doubt suspected, an account of Mr. Gunthorpe's visit: and the lawyer requested her ladyship to send him her instructions within a week. Lady Saxondale was one who seldom delayed in making up her mind how to act: but in this instance she could not resolve so speedily. She saw that the present dilemma was an awkward one: for she was terribly frightened lest Lord Harold Staunton, either through vengeance or remorse, should seek out Deveril and make him acquainted with all the circumstances which had impelled him into provoking the young artist to a duel. If armed with that evidence, Deveril could crush her in a court of justice: but without it, he could not well prove his case against her. She now regretted having made an enemy of Lord Harold Staunton, even though her honour must have been sacrificed in order to purchase his friendship. The result of Lady Saxondale's deliberation was a resolve to propitiate Lord Harold and ensure his silence. But inasmuch as she could not well invite an unmarried young man on a visit by himself to Saxondale Castle, she resolved to send a pressing invitation to Lady Macdonald to pass a few weeks in Lincolnshire, and bring Lord Harold and Lady Florina with her. She accordingly wrote by that very day's post to this effect; and she likewise despatched a letter to Mr. Marlow, repelling with much virtuous indignation what she termed "the black calumnies invented by Deveril against her," but promised to give him farther instructions in a few days.

In the evening Lady Saxondale and Juliana, both elegantly dressed, and both looking grandly beautiful, entered the carriage, and were borne to the mansion of Mr. and Mrs. Denison, which was about two miles distant from the Castle. There was a dinner-party at the Denisons' on this occasion—to be followed by a ball, at which all the surrounding nobility and gentry, with their wives and daughters, were to be present. The Denisons were one of the richest and belonged to one of the oldest families in Lincolnshire. The father and mother were advanced in life, and had several sons and daughters, nearly all of whom were married and settled in different parts of the county. They were of course all present on this occasion. Amongst the other guests was Squire Hawkshaw, whose name has been already mentioned, and whom we must now specially introduce to our readers.

He was a tall, well-made man, about six-and-thirty years of age, and a good specimen of the modern class of "country gentlemen," so far as his personal appearance went: for he had nothing of the coarse manners and roystering vulgarity of the squirearchy of the old school. He was however of a jovial disposition, honest and frank-hearted; with a countenance not positively handsome, but open and good-humoured, and impressing an observer with the conviction that he was a thoroughly straight-forward and well-meaning man. His features were large—his forehead very high—and he possessed a remarkably fine head of brown hair. His manners were good, but neither elegant nor polished: there was nothing vulgar in them, but at the same time they would scarcely have suited the exquisite fastidiousness of the West End of London. His laugh was too loud and merry for the delicate nerves of the mere female creatures of fashion; and yet such was its unalloyed good humour, that only such creatures could have wished it to be more subdued. He dressed well, but not with the extreme nicety of a lounger in Hyde Park or the other fashionable resorts of the metropolis; and he was certainly much more at home with male companions who could converse upon horses, and dogs, and field-sports generally, than at a whist-table as the partner of an old dowager with turbaned head and pursed-up mouth.

Mr. George Hawkshaw was a very rich man. The Hall—as his residence was denominated—was one of the finest country-seats in Lincolnshire; and he maintained a numerous establishment of domestics. How it was that he had not as yet married, no one exactly knew—unless it were, in general terms, that he was not a marrying man. Many a mother however could conscientiously lay her hand upon her heart and affirm that if one of her daughters had not become "Mrs. Hawkshaw of the Hall," it was for no want of manœuvring on her part; and all the marriageable young ladies round about could with equal sincerity satisfy their consciences that they had done their best to ensnare him in love's toils.

Such was the individual whom the Hon. Miss Juliana Farefield had selected in her own mind as her future husband. Juliana reasoned with herself that if the power of her charms and the influence of her fascinations had failed to procure her a husband in the metropolitan circles of fashion, during the six years that had elapsed since she first came out at sixteen, they were by no means likely to experience failure when their artillery was played off against the heart of a country squire; and she felt proudly conscious of the fact that in all Lincolnshire there was not a young lady of such splendid attractions as her own.

Indeed, never had Juliana appeared to greater advantage than on the evening of which we are writing. The ball-dress that she wore displayed the glowing magnificence of her charms—the superb

bust and the arms bare almost to the shoulders. She had arranged her hair in massive bands, with a few tresses hanging down behind from the knot in which its chief luxuriance was gathered at the back of the well-shaped head; and a camelia set off its glossy darkness with a striking effect. The aim upon which she was bent imparted a heightened animation to her countenance; and her eyes shone with even more than their wonted fires. She had resolved to conquer—and that speedily too; and she was already flushed as it were with the foretaste of anticipated triumph.

Now, as the Hon. Miss Farefield was decidedly the female star of the assemblage at the Denisons', and as Mr. Hawkshaw was the most important individual amongst the younger portion of the male guests, it was quite natural that he should give his arm to Juliana to escort her from the drawing-room to the dining-room; and he of course sat next to her at table. She put forth all the powers of her conversation to charm him; and this she did without the slightest betrayal of studied effort. Well knowing what his favourite topics were, she skilfully, but in a manner that seemed perfectly natural, turned the discourse thereon. She seemed to enter into the spirit of the exhilarating sports of the field—gave him to understand that she wished she lived altogether in the country—and was even astonished at the dexterity with which she acquitted herself when speaking of racing, and hunting, and steeple-chasing. Until this evening those topics were Juliana's utter aversion: she had fancied that every sporting character smelt of the stables, and was totally unfit for the roseate light and perfumed atmosphere of drawing-rooms. But now she appeared to enter with enthusiasm into all that pertained to the sporting world; and skilfully catching hints from the remarks which Mr. Hawkshaw himself made, she expanded them into lengthened disquisitions of her own.

Her companion was evidently charmed. The more she talked, the deeper became his interest in her conversation; and presently he found himself gazing upon her with a rapture that he had never known in woman's presence before. New feelings appeared to be taking life in his heart; and as he contemplated her face and her form, the conviction gradually grew upon him that he had never beheld anything so beautiful as those features or so superbly symmetrical as that shape. When he looked at her aquiline profile he fancied that she appeared thus to the greatest advantage: but when she bent her looks upon him and he gazed on her full face, catching all the glorious power of her eyes, he thought that she was still more beautiful thus.

The dinner passed over—the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room—and the gentlemen remained to sit a little longer over their wine. For the first time in his life Mr. Hawkshaw neither appeared to enjoy the wine nor to mingle in the discourse that was taking place around him. His thoughts were all concentrated on the splendid creature who had charmed him during the hour of dinner, and who only so recently left his side. It seemed to him as if some new and hitherto unknown influence had been shed upon him: he longed for the summons to the drawing-room to arrive that he might once more have an opportunity of beholding and conversing with Miss Farefield: he wondered that when he had met her in society on the former occasions that she was in Lincolnshire, he had taken no more notice of her than of the other ladies of his acquaintance; and he could not help asking himself what all these feelings meant, and whether they constituted that love of which he had read in novels and of which he had so frequently heard persons speak? Mr. Denison and the other gentlemen at the table noticed his abstracted mood; and after several vain endeavours to rally him into his wonted joviality, they began dropping merry and good-natured hints to the effect that he must have lost his heart. Then, the confusion which he felt, and the gush of strange emotions that seemed to pour through his breast, sending a thrill along every fibre and through every vein, made him suspect that they had really touched upon the right chord.

At length the summons to coffee arrived; and by one of those sudden inconsistencies, or rather eccentricities, which frequently mark the human character, Mr. Hawkshaw resolved that he would not throw himself in the way of Juliana again, lest his friends and acquaintances should in reality have good reason to say that he was smitten with her. Perhaps too he wished to put his feelings to the test: and perhaps also, he was afraid of being actually ensnared into those matrimonial aspirations against which he had hitherto maintained his heart in such perfect inaccessibility. Therefore, on entering the drawing-room, which was spacious, and where by this time most of the guests who were invited to the ball (having arrived since dinner) were assembled, Mr. Hawkshaw lounged about amongst them, endeavouring to assume an easy unconstrained air: but as he stood conversing first with one acquaintance, then with another, he caught himself falling into fits of abstraction, and his eyes unconsciously wandering to where the Hon. Miss Farefield was seated amongst some ladies in another part of the room.

On her side, she perfectly well comprehended what was passing in Mr. Hawkshaw's mind. Without appearing to observe him, she nevertheless kept her eyes almost constantly fixed upon him from beneath the shade of the long dark fringes. She noticed his moods of abstraction—she beheld his looks wandering towards her—and she likewise perceived that every time he lounged about, he halted nearer and nearer to where she was seated. Thus she had no difficulty in penetrating the kind of struggle that was going on within him; and with a secret glow of triumph she felt the conviction that he was ensnared.

Presently the band, which had been procured from Lincoln to attend upon the occasion, struck up its swelling harmony as a signal for the dancing to commence. A young nobleman, of high rank but wretchedly affected manners, advanced and requested the honour of Juliana's hand for the first quadrille: but well aware that Mr. Hawkshaw did not dance, she was about to refuse on the plea of headache—when it suddenly occurred to her that in the mazes of the dance she would be afforded an opportunity of displaying her fine form to its utmost advantage. Besides, if Hawkshaw were really smitten—as she had no doubt he was—it would pique his jealousy to behold her the companion of

another, and would effectually bring him back to her side so soon as the dance should be over. She accordingly accepted the proposal, and stood up with her partner. The rapid glance which she threw towards Hawkshaw, at once showed her that he had been watching with a degree of interest which he could not altogether conceal, the result of a little dialogue between herself and the young nobleman who had invited her to dance; and she even observed that a look of annoyance appeared for a moment upon his features as she suffered her partner to lead her out.

When she had taken her place in the quadrille, she noticed that Mr. Hawkshaw remained standing to gaze upon the dancers; and she knew that it was for *her* he thus lingered. Never did Juliana float with a more graceful ease through the mazes of the dance: never did she display a more elegant lightness, mingled with a certain fashionable languor, than upon this occasion. Mr. Hawkshaw followed all her movements: he thought no longer of being ridiculed by his friends: he cared nothing about losing his heart for indeed it was already lost. All the raptures he had experienced at the dinner-table were revived in his breast: he again felt as he had never felt before towards any being in female shape: he appeared to be hurried along by some strong current of feeling over which he had no power, and which might bear him whithersoever it chose, and he unable to resist.

"What a veway wemarkable fine day we have had, Mith Farefield," observed the young nobleman, during the first interval which afforded an opportunity for conversation.

"Quite delightful," responded Juliana.

"I went out widing thith mawning about thwee o'clock—I thuppoth the common people would call it the afternoon—and it wath ekthtwemely pleathant—thowarm—thothunny—everwything tho gween—the tweeth tho thady—the wiver tho

owght—the birdth tho melodiouth—quite chawming, chawming."

"I have no doubt your lordship enjoyed your ride amazingly," observed Juliana, glancing towards the spot where Hawkshaw stood.

"I had my cweam-coloured horth—thuth a thplendid cweature—and he wath tho frithky, Mith Farefield. I thought he would wun over the common people in the woadth and fieldth—but he didn't. Wathn't it conthiderate on hith part? Ah! he'th thuth a thagathiouth animal. Do you wide, Mith Farefield?"

"Oh! yes—occasionally," was the response.

"Chawming! chawming! I thall come and feth you thome mawning, if you are agweeable, to have a wun over the fieldth. I wode thwough a flock of geeth yethterday—and thuth a hithing, Mith Farefield, you never heard. I thought there wath a thouthand thnaketh in the gwarth. It wath veway delithiouth—veway amuthing."

"It must have been," said Juliana.

In such edifying and delightful conversation as this did the intervals in the quadrille pass; and when it was over, Juliana, having promenaded two or three times round the room with her partner, was escorted by him back to her seat. He then made his bow and retired in the usual manner; and the next instant Mr. Hawkshaw was by her side.

"Why, where have you been?" she said, as if she had not been watching his countenance almost the whole time that she was meandering with the grace of a Venus and the dignity of a Diana through the dance. "I really thought you had taken your departure, or that you were still with the gentlemen in the dining-room."

These words came for a moment like a shock upon Mr. Hawkshaw: for they appeared to bespeak the most perfect indifference on the part of Juliana —an indifference, however, which he himself was so far from reciprocating! Juliana saw the effect of her words; and as it was no part of her intention to throw cold water upon the flame she had already excited, but merely to avoid having the appearance of laying herself out to ensnare him, she hastened to speak in other terms.

"At all events, I am glad you have found me out again," she said, in a sort of confidential manner: "for I have been terribly fatigued by the dull platitudes of that silly young man who did me the honour of dancing with me; and I quite missed the lively discourse you and I had at the dinner-table."

"I am rejoiced that you should feel yourself able to pay me such a compliment, Miss Farefield," said Mr Hawkshaw, now full of rapture again. "But hither comes a gentleman who, I know, means to ask you to dance:"—and he looked annoyed.

"Do *you* not dance?" inquired Juliana, already well aware that he did not.

"I am sorry to say," was the response, "that I am not sufficiently a lady's man."

"Well, after all," observed Juliana, "it is very insipid: and to tell you the truth I care nothing about it."

At this moment the gentleman alluded to, advanced and solicited the honour of her hand in the next quadrille for which she might happen to be disengaged: but Miss Farefield, with the most polished affability, assured the applicant that she did not mean to dance any more that evening. He accordingly bowed and retired.

"Give me your arm," she said to Mr. Hawkshaw, "and let us lounge into the card-room and see what is going on there."

Her companion was delighted; and as her hand was gently laid upon his arm, even that soft feather-like touch appeared to send an unknown thrill of ecstacy through his entire form. They proceeded to the card-room; and after loitering round the tables, retired to an inner apartment, where portfolios of prints lay open upon a table for the inspection of those who thought fit to lounge there. Juliana seated herself near a *console*, upon which her arm rested; and Hawkshaw remained standing by her side.

"It is quite delightful to get away from those heated rooms," said Juliana. "The air in the ball-room was quite oppressive,—or rather the absence of it was intolerable. You, Mr. Hawkshaw, who are always accustomed to the open air, with plenty of manly exercise,—I am almost astonished that *you* can endure the stifling atmosphere of apartments crowded with guests?"

"At all events, on the present occasion," he answered, in a low and somewhat hesitating voice, "I am overjoyed that I came hither this evening."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Juliana, affecting not to understand him. "And what particular inducement might you have had?"

"None to bring me hither—but perhaps some to make me remain later than I should otherwise have done:"—and he now looked at her with a rapture which he could not conceal, and which she could not have mistaken, even had she been ten thousand times less experienced than she was.

"You are speaking in enigmas," she observed; but slightly inclining her head, she appeared to be playing with her fan.

At this moment three or four ladies from the card-room entered the apartment where the dialogue was taking place, and where it was so rapidly approaching an interesting crisis; and Juliana inwardly wished all imaginable evils on the heads of those who had thus interrupted the tête-à-tête Outwardly, however, she did not display her vexation: the discourse became general with those who had just entered; and for the rest of the evening there was no farther opportunity for Miss Farefield to draw her admirer out.

On handing her and Lady Saxondale to their carriage, Mr. Hawkshaw could not help pressing Juliana's hand; and on returning to his own abode, it struck him to be so gloomy, lonely, and cheerless, that he would have felt quite in desponding spirits, had not the image of the beautiful and brilliant Miss Farefield been present in his mind to cheer him.

CHAPTER LXII.

HAROLD STAUNTON.

Two days afterwards a travelling-carriage drove up to the gate of Saxondale Castle, at about six o'clock in the evening; and Lady Macdonald, accompanied by Lord Harold Staunton and Lady Florina, alighted

They were welcomed with every appearance of cordiality by Lady Saxondale, and with a real sincerity by Juliana, who was exceedingly glad to have company at the Castle, which to her was dull enough, although Mr. Hawkshaw had called on each of the two mornings since the ball.

The quick eye of Lady Saxondale discovered at the first glance that Florina was unhappy and desponding in reality, and that the gaiety she assumed was only forced. Her ladyship therefore saw that Florina still pined on Deveril's account; and the pain of her fair young rival was a joy and a triumph to the heart of that vindictive and jealous woman. While alone with Lady Macdonald for a few moments before dinner, Lady Saxondale took the opportunity of inquiring, apparently in a casual and indifferent manner, if Mr. Deveril had made any further attempts to renew his acquaintance at Cavendish Square since the duel? and she was informed that he had not.

As a matter of course Lady Saxondale did not openly testify the spite which she cherished against Florina, but treated her with her wonted affability, and as her future daughter-in-law. For it was a source of infinite satisfaction to the vindictive lady to think that Florina, though attached to Deveril, should be sacrificed to her own profligate and worthless son Edmund.

But how had Lady Saxondale and Harold Staunton met? With the well-bred ease of persons in their station of life, and to all outward appearance as if nothing unpleasant had ever occurred between them. But as Lady Saxondale had given him her hand on his arrival, the quick glances of deep meaning which they exchanged, showed that they thoroughly understood each other. On the one hand Harold Staunton comprehended that the circumstance of his being included in the invitation sent to his aunt and sister, was a proof that Lady Saxondale purposed to seek a reconciliation with him: and upon what terms could such reconciliation be effected, save and except on his own conditions? On the other hand, her ladyship perceived that he was quite willing to accept such reconciliation; and she had therefore no doubt of securing him entirely to her own interest.

The dinner was served up at about seven o'clock; and when the dessert was over a little after eight, the party descended into the gardens to walk—for the evening was serenely beautiful. Lady Macdonald, fatigued with the day's travelling, soon returned into the Castle. Florina and Juliana kept together—while Lady Saxondale and Harold were thus left to themselves.

"Have I rightly understood your ladyship's kindness?" asked Staunton, gently placing her arm in his own, and leading her into a secluded avenue.

"Tell me what you understand by the term kindness," responded her ladyship, but with a smile which gave him every encouragement to proceed.

"I can only conclude that you would not have invited me hither," returned Harold, "unless you had made up your mind to atone for your past cruelty."

"Then it is not too late to offer such atonement?" said Lady Saxondale in a subdued voice.

"You must indeed have but a poor opinion of your own charms," rejoined Staunton, "if you imagine that they are not sufficient to subdue any rancour which I may have experienced in respect to what is past. I have been vindictive—terribly vindictive; and perhaps I even went too far in revealing everything to Edmund. But you must make allowances for the state of mind into which I was thrown. Consider what I had done for you. I had risked my own life—and I had nearly taken the life of another!"

"Would that you had effectually done so!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale bitterly.

"Have you still cause to be so vindictive against Deveril?" inquired Staunton. "Of course I have been at no loss to comprehend how he merited your anger. For a woman of such grand and magnificent beauty as you possess, and who condescended to fix her thoughts upon a miserable obscure artist, —for such a woman, I say, to experience a rebuff, was provoking indeed."

"Do not allude to it any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale, impatiently: for she of course knew that it was useless to contradict the story to one who had every reason to understand it so thoroughly.

"Pardon me, dear Lady Saxondale," he replied, "if I dwell upon that topic for a moment; because I wish you to understand me well. I am not so insensate nor so vain as to believe that you are in love with me. I know very well that after having so recently set your mind upon Deveril, you can scarcely, even in the mere caprice of woman, snatch me up to supply his place. Therefore you have some motive in effecting a reconciliation with me. Do be candid, and explain what that motive is."

"You will not, then, give me credit for any kind or generous feelings towards you?" said Lady Saxondale: "but you think that even in this reconciliation I am selfish?"

"I cannot think that you entertain the slightest tenderness towards me—particularly after the dreadful scene which took place between us at your house. I can therefore only attribute your present conduct to one of two alternatives; and if it were only for curiosity's sake, I should like to know which it is."

"And those alternatives?" said Lady Saxondale inquiringly.

"The first is, that you seek a paramour, and have perhaps thought that you might as well take me into your favour in that light; and the second is, that you again wish to avail yourself of my services and do not regard the sacrifice you must make to obtain them."

"Now tell me, Lord Harold Staunton," said Lady Saxondale, stopping short and looking him full in the face,—"do you take me for a woman who is privately profligate, though before the world possessing an untarnished reputation?"

"I candidly confess that until quite recently I believed you to be a woman of the strictest prudence and propriety: but you yourself will allow that I have no great reason to flatter myself *now* that I shall be the first on whom you have bestowed your favours since your husband's death."

"On my soul, I swear to you, Harold," replied Lady Saxondale, "that you wrong me! It was a moment of weakness that led me to make overtures to Deveril and place myself in his power. Now, will you not believe me? I have no object in de-

ceiving you: I do not even know that I have any particular object in thus vindicating myself up to the present time—unless it be that it is natural for a woman to take credit for as much virtue as she possesses, even in the presence of him to whom that virtue is about to be surrendered."

"I do believe you," responded Staunton, in a voice which showed that he spoke with sincerity. "I am sufficiently acquainted with the world to be able to discover a demirep, no matter how thick may be the veil of hypocrisy that she wears; and having known you for some few years, I should certainly have detected you ere now. Yes—I do believe you; and therefore all the more welcome are you to me, dear Lady Saxondale!"

Thus speaking, he passed his arm round her waist; and in the shade of the avenue where they were walking, he embraced her. There was an interval of silence—and they proceeded slowly on, he still with his arm round her waist.

"But you have not told me what I can do for you," he at length resumed. "I am sure there is something in which you need my services."

"No—not at present, I can assure you," answered Lady Saxondale. "But tell me candidly—indeed, I beseech you to speak with the utmost sincerity—for it is important. Have you breathed to a soul, except Edmund, those circumstances that so much angered you against me?. Pray do not deceive me. If you have, I shall forgive you, and must make the best of it. But if you have not, so much the better."

"Is it then so very important?" asked Lord Harold, slightly fencing with the question.

"Ah! I perceive that you have told some one?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "Now, Harold, listen to me. You must not leave me in the dark in this respect—you must not be afraid to confess the extent to which you have betrayed me. I am prepared to give myself up to you—I will even endeavour to love you—I feel that I already begin to like you; and if you devote yourself entirely to my interests, there is nothing I will not do to serve you. Therefore pray be candid; and to show you that I am inclined to put the fullest confidence in you, I will tell you presently wherefore I am so urgent in asking the question."

"I will therefore speak without reserve," said Harold. "Unfortunately," he continued, "you rendered me so bitterly vindictive against you, that I was not careful how I compromised you. There are two persons besides Edmund, to whom I have told everything."

"Two persons! Who are they?"

"One is Edmund's mistress—for I suppose that you know or suspect that he *has* a mistress; and the other is my faithful and devoted servant Alfred."

"Good God! this is most serious," murmured Lady Saxondale: and Staunton felt that she shuddered in the half-embrace in which he still retained her as they walked slowly along.

"Why is it so serious?" he inquired.

"Because," she rejoined in a thick voice, but with bitter accents, "I am threatened with a law-suit for the defamation of William Deveril's character; and that persevering, obstinate, dogged old man, Mr. Gunthorpe, is at the bottom of it all. It is doubtless his gold that will enable Deveril to carry on the process. If by any accident he should contrive to obtain witnesses to the whole or any portion of those transactions in which I so fatally involved myself, the result would be exposure—ruin—disgrace—dishonour——Oh, I could not survive it!"

"And he has threatened you with an action?" said Harold, in a thoughtful mood: it was not however precisely upon what he had heard that he was thinking, but rather upon a subject which had gradually arisen in his mind within the last few minutes.

"He has threatened me with an action—or the alternative is that I sign a document to be circulated privately, denying the truth of the statement I had made to my friends concerning him. *That* I will never do. I would sooner risk the law-suit. To sign the death-warrant of my own honour—to commit a suicidal act in respect to my own fame, were impossible!"—and Lady Saxondale spoke with the vehemence of a strong excitement.

"To be sure—you cannot do that," rejoined Harold. "A document to be circulated privately,—no, no—that will never do! As well the full exposure! Even if you lost the law-suit, you might still persist that your cause was just, and that you were an injured woman: but if you once sign such a paper, all is over."

"That is exactly the view I take of it. Mr. Marlow has written to me. Of course he does not believe Deveril's story for a moment: but how could I ever look him in the face again if I were to write and tell him that I will sign an acknowledgment of my own guilt?"

"It is indeed most serious," rejoined Staunton. "Edmund's mistress is the only one to be feared: on my valet Alfred I can rely."

"You have not brought him down with you?" said Lady Saxondale quickly: "for I could not look him in the face——"

"No," answered Staunton. "My aunt and Florina had to bring their two maids; and they would not consent that too many persons should encumber the carriage. Besides, from motives of delicacy—having unfortunately told Alfred the whole story in a fit of spleen and spite—I would not insist upon bringing him."

"But who is Edmund's mistress? I suspected that he had one, as he has been so constantly away from home of late——"

"She is an opera-dancer, known as Mademoiselle D'Alembert: her real name is Emily Archer. I can no doubt manage her. She is venal—and money will effectually silence her."

"But if she should have already gossipped upon the subject?" observed Lady Saxondale.

"I do not think it is likely," returned Staunton: "but of course I cannot take upon myself to answer for her discretion. You see that I do not buoy you up with vain hopes."

"No: it were foolish to do so. Will you return to London, upon some pretence, as soon as possible, and see her? You shall have cheques upon my bankers, that you may possess adequate means to satisfy her rapacity. Can you not pretend to-morrow that you have received some important letters from London requiring your prompt presence there?"

"Yes: leave it to me to manage," replied Staunton, still thoughtfully and almost abstractedly, as if while he was talking upon one subject he was re-

volving another in his mind; but Lady Saxondale was too much absorbed in the contemplation of her own perilous position, to notice his mood.

They continued to walk together for a few minutes longer, until they heard the voices of Juliana and Florina at the extremity of the avenue; and then Harold quickly withdrew his arm from around the admirably modelled form of the superb Lady Saxondale.

The night passed; and on the following morning it happened that Harold did receive by the post a letter from a friend in London. It was delivered at the breakfast-table; and he immediately said that business of urgent importance in connexion with some friend who had fallen into difficulties, required his speedy return to the metropolis; but he added that his absence would only last a few days, at the expiration of which time he should have the pleasure of joining the circle at Saxondale Castle again. His aunt bade him not be so foolish as to hurry off for the purpose of meddling with the affairs of friends in difficulties: but Staunton managed to convince her that it was absolutely necessary—and Lady Macdonald accordingly said little more upon the subject.

After breakfast Florina and Juliana went out together to walk in the garden; and Lady Macdonald sat herself down to read a new novel. Lady Saxondale whispered to Staunton to join her in a few minutes in the drawing-room; and thither he accordingly proceeded.

"My dear Harold," she said, "I thank you for this fulfilment of your promise. You know that I am now your's as much as woman can be, short of the marriage-ties. In surrendering myself to you this night past, I have descended for the first time from that pinnacle of honour which I have maintained since my husband's death nineteen years back! Oh! do you not confess that I deserve all you can do for me? But wherefore do you regard me in so singular a manner?"—and Lady Saxondale felt suddenly frightened at the looks of her paramour.

"It is time that we should have further explanations," was Staunton's answer, delivered with the tone of a man who felt that he was exercising an authority which could not be disputed.

"What mean you?" asked Lady Saxondale in a faint voice, and trembling all over; for she was smitten with a presentiment of evil.

"It will be your own fault," Staunton went on to say, "if we do not settle matters very amicably indeed. You have already said that you are mine as far as woman can be where the marriage vows have not been pronounced. Wherefore should those marriage vows not pass between us?"

Lady Saxondale was confounded and stricken speechless: she could scarcely believe her ears, and gazed in vacant bewilderment upon Lord Harold.

"Now, my dear Harriet," he resumed, "do not be childish—for we must talk seriously. You assured me last night, with a sincerity which I could not doubt, that your life had been pure and spotless, and that the moment of weakness in which you had given encouragement to Deveril was the *one* solitary instance: but as *that* led to no result, we may as well pass it over as nothing at all. Now, as I confess that it would not be very agreeable to me to marry a demirep and behold the laugh of scorn or the smile of superciliousness upon the lips of those who had previously been her paramours, I should not have thought of seeking you as a wife if it had not been for that solemn assurance. You have a handsome jointure of your own; besides which, you have a good sum of ready money which you have saved. All this I know, of course, from Edmund. It is true that there is the disparity of a few years between your age and mine: but then I look older than I am, and you look much younger than you are; and therefore the match will not be so inconsistent after all. Besides, without any flattery, you are of a beauty so splendid that it seems to defy the ravages of Time. Altogether, therefore, you will suit me as a wife better than any lady of my acquaintance—that is to say, better than any one who would be likely to have a man of no fortune such as I am."

"Is it possible that you are serious, Harold?" asked Lady Saxondale, who had listened in mute astonishment to this business-like and matter-of-fact speech, wherein however there was a certain pervasive under-current of patrician levity. "For if you be perpetrating a jest, it is cruel to joke with me under such circumstances."

"I never was more serious in my life," rejoined Harold: "and I am convinced that when you come to reflect, you will see that it is the best thing I can do for myself: inasmuch as that old uncle of mine Lord Eagledean does not seem at all inclined to die. I have had no letters and no remittances from him within the last two or three weeks, as I had expected; and at all events he could not possibly be offended with me for making such a match—he would regard it as a very excellent one."

"You must be mad, Harold!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot with impatience. "If you marry me, how can Edmund marry your sister?"

"Permit me to take care of myself and think of my sister afterwards. Do you not comprehend that if Edmund married Florina, it would prove of no pecuniary advantage to myself?—for I could not spunge upon them—whereas by marrying you, I secure to myself a fine position at once. Of course the affair would be broken off between Edmund and Florina; and we should soon find another eligible match for the former, and a wealthy husband for the latter. Depend upon it, my dear Harriet, the scheme is admirable. I revolved it in my mind all the time I was conversing with you last evening; but I thought it better not to broach it until this morning—because I knew that in the interval you would become more truly mine than you were before. Now we are husband and wife in all except the marriage ceremony; and that may be solemnized in a very short time."

"Do you mean me to understand," asked Lady Saxondale, determined to come to the point at once, "that you are not making a mere proposal which I am at liberty to reject if I choose, but that you are dictating terms to which I am to submit?"

"Pray do not suffer aggravating language to pass between us," rejoined Lord Harold: "or you will compel me to speak more candidly still."

"Then speak candidly!" said her ladyship in a decisive tone.

"I will do so, since you require it. First of all, you enlisted me in your service to provoke Deveril to a duel, with the solemn understanding that if I

did your bidding my reward was to be the highest that woman could bestow. To the best of my power I *did* your bidding. Heaven knows but too well that I did my best to lay Deveril dead upon the field,—and the crime is registered in that same heaven against me! When I sought you afterwards, how was I treated? I need not do more than remind you of all that passed between us. Now you have summoned me into your presence again—but not willingly, spontaneously, of your own accord. No: *again* do you require my services; and therefore did you send for me to become your instrument, your agent, and your tool. In all these matters you have shown yourself intensely selfish, Harriet; and I have nothing to thank you for. But do you suppose that I will consent to serve your purposes thus, as a mere convenience—a sort of hireling? 'Tis true that our connexion has become suddenly intimate: yet what guarantee have I that when your aim is answered and this dilemma of your's is settled, you will not cast me off with scorn again? At all events, as you have sought to make me serve your purposes, it is but a just retaliation that I should make you serve mine. It therefore suits me to claim you as my wife; and upon the written condition that you will become so, will I repair to London and completely baffle all your enemies."

"And you have maturely considered your plans?" said Lady Saxondale, over whose countenance suddenly passed that same dark and ominous expression which had on two or three occasions appeared thereon during her disputes with the deceased Mabel.

"Have I not spoken in the calm, quiet, and deliberate style of a man who has well considered the project which he propounds?"—and as Harold gave utterance to these words, his own looks assumed the firmest decision: for he had construed that ominous expression on Lady Saxondale's face to be the mere effect of her angry feelings—he considered it indeed to be the passing cloud of an indignation to a tempestuous outburst of which she dared not give vent.

"Well then," said her ladyship, after a pause, "if you be so resolute, I have no alternative but to consent—inasmuch as I perceive you consider me to be so completely in your power——"

"You understand your position," interrupted Harold. "With a breath I could destroy you. My testimony on the side of Deveril in the law-suit which is threatened, would be damnatory: for remember, there is the masquerade-dress which your own son possessed himself of, and which could be brought as a proof of my tale."

"Enough!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for a moment biting her lip; and as she turned towards a table, on which there were writing materials, that sinister expression, so darkly ominous, again appeared upon her countenance.

She seated herself at the table, and prepared to write: but suddenly throwing down the pen, she looked up and said, "Perhaps you had better draw up this promise of marriage in your own terms; and I will either copy the document, or sign the one you write."

"No: we need not take so much trouble as to make copies. You can write to my dictation. Are you ready?"

"I am. Proceed."

"Now then, begin thus:—'I the undersigned, Harriet Saxondale, feeling myself to be under the deepest obligations to Lord Harold Staunton, for delicate services which he has rendered me, and entertaining for that nobleman the sincerest love and affection, do hereby pledge myself to bestow upon him my hand in marriage at the expiration of one month from the present date; and inasmuch as I am aware that for my sake he is renouncing certain brilliant prospects of his own in a matrimonial point of view, I do hereby bind myself in the sum of *one hundred thousand pounds* to fulfil this compact within or at the period above specified.'"

"Is that all?" asked Lady Saxondale, who had written with a firm hand to Staunton's dictation.

"I think that is an admirable document—terse and business-like—and with as few falsehoods in it as such a thing can possibly have. Your love and affection for me, and the brilliant matrimonial prospects which I renounce, are the only fictions: but they are beautiful ones of their kind. A lawyer would have crammed in a thousand falsehoods, and not one so romantic or touching."

"Cease this levity, Harold: for the carriage is already at the door."

"Pardon me: but I was in a lively mood. Now your pretty signature to that document—and I am off."

"It is completed," said Lady Saxondale. "And here is a cheque for a thousand guineas. Will that suffice for the purposes you have in hand?"

"If not, I can easily write for more," he responded: "but depend upon it, I do not wish to encroach more than I can help upon funds that will shortly be our's jointly. And now farewell, my dear Harriet."

He embraced Lady Saxondale, who suffered rather than returned his caress; and then having hastened to take leave of his aunt, Juliana, and Florina, Lord Harold Staunton leapt into the carriage and set off on his way back to London.

Immediately after he had taken his departure, Lady Saxondale sat down and penned a letter in a feigned hand. She then ordered her carriage, observing that she had to go to Gainsborough (the nearest town) in order to transact a little business with the banker there. As Juliana expected a call from Mr. Hawkshaw, she did not volunteer to accompany her mother; and as her ladyship's intended ride appeared to be of a purely business character, Florina also preferred remaining at the Castle. As for Lady Macdonald, she was too much fatigued with the long journey of the previous day to stir out; and thus Lady Saxondale's secret hope was fulfilled, that she would be enabled to visit Gainsborough alone. She had in reality no business of any kind to transact with the banker, but merely sought an opportunity of putting her letter with her own hand into the post, so that none of her dependants might perceive the address.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE POST-OFFICE.

We must now direct the reader's attention to the interior of the Post-Office at Gainsborough. It was the heur of noon; and two clerks were attending to the business of the establishment—one paying the money-orders—the other sorting the letters as they were dropped through the slit in the window, and also answering such inquiries as might be made at the little trap-door of the usual fashion adopted at country post-offices.

"I should think that Smith was sure to have come back last night," observed one of the clerks to the other.

"Yes: his holiday was up," responded the latter. "I wonder he hasn't shown himself already this morning. He has had a fortnight of it."

"Where did he go to?"

"To London, I fancy. He said that he should. My turn comes next; and I have made up my mind to visit London."

At this moment four or five letters were thrust one after the other through the slit; and one of them falling farther than the rest, fell into an inkstand which was standing upon the counter.

"Look here!" cried the clerk who attended to the sorting of the letters. "This comes, you see, of that rascally carpenter delaying to put up the letter-box again:"—and as he spoke he dried the soiled letter, upon a piece of blotting-paper. "What a nuisance it is! He promised to put it up again last night: but this is the way he always serves us whenever he has to do a job here."

"It's too bad," observed the other clerk. "But here's Smith!" he suddenly exclaimed, looking through the aperture where he paid the money-orders.

Almost immediately afterwards a young man of about two-and-twenty entered the office and greeted his two colleagues: for he was one of the clerks in the establishment.

"So here I am again," he said, in a tone of regret that his holiday was over.

"Well, Smith, how have you enjoyed yourself?" inquired both his companions in a breath.

"Uncommonly," was the reply. "I only wish my holiday had been for a month instead of a fortnight. But by the bye, I understand Lady Saxondale has come back to the Castle?"

"She's been there for some days past," responded one of his comrades. "Is it true, though, that Miss Constance has eloped with a French Marquis?"

"Quite true," replied Smith. "It has caused such a sensation in London! They say she cut off just at the moment the carriage was at the door, and that she hired some old gipsy-woman to come up at the time and draw off her ladyship's attention. That's the rumour. But of course I don't know how true it is."

"Is it a good match for Miss Constance?"

"Or rather the Marchioness of Villebelle, as you must now call her," replied Smith. "Well, as for it's being a good match, I don't exactly know. I should think she might have done better—such a sweet beautiful creature as she is. The Marquis, I understand, is a very handsome man—quite young: that is o say, not above six or seven-and-twenty; and he has got a diplomatic situation. But that's all he has to depend upon."

"I'll be bound her ladyship is precious wild," exclaimed one of the clerks. "But when did you come back?"

"Last night. I travelled down with such a nice young fellow; and as we were alone together the whole way, we had quite an agreeable conversation. A more intelligent, amiable, but at the same time fine-spirited young gentleman, I don't think I ever met with. Perhaps you remember reading about a duel that took place the other day between a certain Lord Harold Staunton and a Mr. Deveril?"

"To be sure: and the report was that Deveril was killed—but it afterwards appeared that he was only dangerously wounded."

"Well," responded Smith, "this same Mr. Deveril it was with whom I travelled from London yesterday. He still looks pale and enfeebled, but is fast reccvering of the severe injury he received."

"And what brings him down to Gainsborough?"

"I do not know: he did not volunteer any explanation, and therefore of course I did not question him."

"It happens that Lord Harold Staunton himself is at Saxondale Castle at this very time," observed one of the clerks: "or at all events a letter, directed to him there, was sent along to the castle this morning."

"This is strange," exclaimed Smith: "for Mr. Deveril appears anxious to see that fine old castle and its environs; and I promised that I would take him over there to-day. Indeed I expect him every moment: for it was noon that we appointed to meet. He is a total stranger at Gainsborough, and therefore availed himself of my proposal to escort him."

"Then you do not mean to attend to business to-day, I suppose?" observed one of his colleagues, laughing.

"No. Mind you, my leave of absence is not up until to-night."

At this moment some one inquired at the open trap-door of the money-order clerk for Mr. Smith, who immediately recognizing the voice, exclaimed, "Ah! is it you, Mr. Deveril? Walk round, and we will take our departure in a few minutes."

Deveril accordingly entered the office, and was introduced by Mr. Smith to the other clerks. While they were conversing some one knocked at the trap-door of the window; and the particular clerk whose duty it was to answer questions, opened the said little door and gave whatsoever information was required. At that same instant a lady, hurriedly passing the post-office, dropped a letter through the hole; and by accident it shared the fate of a previous one by falling upon the inkstand.

"Well, *that is* odd!" exclaimed the clerk who had just answered the questions of the inquirer at the window. "Who do you think it was that just threw this letter in?—and, by Jove, it has fallen into the ink! Now isn't it too bad of that carpenter——"

"Who was it?" inquired Smith.

"Lady Saxondale herself."

Deveril started at this name: but the circumstance was not perceived by the other young men.

"Well, if this is not the most extraordinary thing I ever knew in my life," exclaimed the clerk who had recognized Lady Saxondale, and who having dried the blotch of ink upon the letter, was now examining the address.

"What's extraordinary?"

"Why, that her ladyship should have such a correspondent as this. Just read the address: it really doesn't sound at all aristocratic. *Mr. Solomon Patch, the Billy Goat, Agar Town, St. Pancras, London.*"

"Oh! very likely it's some old servant of her ladyship's," observed Smith carelessly; "or perhaps some one who has applied to her for charity. Who knows?"

"It looks uncommon like as if it was written in a feigned hand," observed the clerk who had picked it up from the inkstand: and he still continued to scrutinize it. "I think we know her ladyship's writing here pretty well; and if this isn't her's disguised in this manner, then I am a fool and an idiot. You see, Mr. Deveril," he continued, "we clerks in the post-office are so accustomed to all kinds of writing that we have great experience in such matters."

"Now," interrupted Smith, "I am sure Mr. Deveril does not want to hear a lecture upon this subject."

"The letter," continued the clerk, heedless of his colleague's interruption, "is not sealed, you see, with the usual armorial bearings, but with a plain stamp—the top of a pencil-case, I should say. I wonder her ladyship should have come to put it in the post herself."

"I am ready, Mr. Deveril, and at your service," observed Smith: "for I am sure you must be getting tired of this long talk about nothing."

The young clerk of the post-office and William Deveril accordingly issued forth together; and proceeding to the hotel where the latter had taken up his quarters, they entered a vehicle which he had ordered to be got in readiness; and away they sped towards Saxondale Castle.

Deveril was more interested in the little incident which had just occurred, than his companion had fancied he could possibly be. Having a deeper insight into Lady Saxondale's character than either of the clerks in the post-office, he had even been more struck by the circumstance than the one who himself had appeared to think it extraordinary. He knew enough of London to be aware that Agar Town was a quarter of no very good repute; and the description which had recently appeared in the newspapers of the horrible murder in the barge, and which Deveril had happened to read at the time, had contained particular allusions to the notoriously bad characters who infested that place It was therefore by no means surprising that Deveril should think it strange for Lady Saxondale to have a correspondent there; and the evidently furtive manner in which, with her own hand, she had borne the letter to the post,—as well as the disguised writing which the clerk had detected,—served to strengthen the young gentleman's suspicions that it was not altogether for a very correct or harmless purpose that a proud and titled lady, as fastidious as she was brilliant, should address a letter to an individual at the sign of the *Billy Goat* in Agar Town! But although Deveril mentioned not the subject of his thoughts to his companion Mr. Smith, he did not the less continue to ponder thereon.

On reaching the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle, William Deveril intimated to his new acquaintance that he did not wish to approach too near with the vehicle, so as to become the object of particular notice on the part of any of its inmates—but that he was merely desirous of viewing the edifice from a suitable distance, and of obtaining a glimpse of the grounds. Mr. Smith thought that he was somewhat too particular, as there could be no possible harm in strangers approaching close up to the building; and he morever intimated that a fee to the servants would procure Deveril an inspection of the old tapestry-rooms, the chapel, and the other curiosities of the baronial edifice. But Deveril declined to avail himself of the suggestion, and appeared to be content with merely making the circuit of the castle and pleasure-grounds, except on that side where the river flowed by, washing the very foot of the walls, so that no one could pass that way.

Having thus far gratified his curiosity, as Mr. Smith was led to suppose, Deveril returned to the vehicle, accompanied by his new friend; and they retraced their way to Gainsborough. On the road they met Lady Saxondale's carriage returning from the town: but as her ladyship was reclining back at the time, Deveril both believed and hoped that she had not observed *him*, as he indeed had not caught a glimpse of *her* countenance.

Return we now to the castle, where in the meantime Mr. Hawkshaw had called; and inasmuch as Juliana had dropped a hint to Florina that he was paying his court to her, the young lady discreetly left the Hon. Miss Farefield a full opportunity of rambling alone with the Squire in the gardens. We need scarcely say that Juliana failed not to develop the requisite fascinations to rivet the shackles which she had already succeeded in throwing around Mr. Hawkshaw's heart. But although this gentleman was madly and enthusiastically in love with Juliana, he naturally conceived that a courtship of but a few days was not sufficient to warrant him in making a proposal. It is true that he had been acquainted with Miss Farefield for some years: indeed he had known her ever since she was a girl; but it was only from the date of the Denisons' party three or four days back, that he had been led to regard her with such admiration. Not being over well versed in love-matters, Mr. Hawkshaw had looked into a few novels to see how the heroes and heroines conducted their affairs of the heart; and the result was that he found himself rather bewildered how to act. For in one novel he perceived that the hero and heroine fell desperately in love with each other the instant they met—that in less than half-an-hour the former was on his knees at the feet of the latter—and that a passionate avowal of love was followed by the tenderest embraces: while in another romance the amorous swain sighed, and serenaded, and fluttered bashfully about the object of his love for a whole year without daring to confess his passion. The result however of Mr. Hawkshaw's researches in books, was to lead him to the conclusion that he should at least allow a month to elapse ere he proclaimed himself a suitor for Juliana's hand. The young lady, on her side, would fain have brought matters more precipitately to a crisis: but she was

afraid of spoiling the whole affair by giving Mr. Hawkshaw too much encouragement; and she therefore acted with considerable art and skill—suffering him to perceive that he was a special favourite, enrapturing him with her discourse, and successfully tightening the silken cords which bound him to her.

On Lady Saxondale's return, Mr. Hawkshaw was invited to stay to dinner—an offer which he did not refuse; and when he departed in the evening, it was with so much intoxicating love in his soul that he began to ask himself whether he might not abridge the month's courtship, as already laid down to be the rule of his conduct, into a fortnight?

On the following day, at about eleven in the forenoon, Mr. Hawkshaw called again, it having been agreed that he should escort Juliana for a ride across the country. The Hon. Miss Fairfield was a good equestrian—a circumstance which had no small weight in convincing Mr. Hawkshaw that she would make him a most excellent and suitable wife. Florina did not ride: Juliana accordingly went out alone with her admirer—that is to say, they were attended only by the groom. Lady Saxondale had letters to write—Lady Macdonald was somewhat indisposed and would not stir out—and thus Florina was thrown upon her own resources.

The young lady walked alone in the garden, wrapped up in a mournful reverie. She could not help thinking of William Deveril, notwithstanding all her efforts to banish his image from her mind. Nothing had come to her knowledge to alter her suspicions concerning him. She still had every reason to believe that he was living improperly with Angela Vivaldi, the opera-dancer; and the circumstance was still regarded by her as a corroboration of Lady Saxondale's story of his improper conduct. Her brother Harold, be it remembered, had never suspected her love for Deveril. At the time he encountered the young artist issuing from the garden-gate of his aunt's house in Cavendish Square, he knew not that there had been an interview between him and his sister—he fancied that Deveril was there merely for the purpose of seeking an opportunity of giving some explanations to Lady Macdonald in reference to the tale in circulation with regard to himself and Lady Saxondale. Therefore, Harold had no idea of Florina's love for Deveril; and Florina herself had not chosen to make voluntary confession thereof. Deeply, deeply had she been afflicted at the intelligence of the duel: most profound indeed was her sorrow, amounting almost to anguish, when it was first rumoured that Deveril had been killed——and killed too by her own brother! The misery she then felt, and the difficulty she had at the time in veiling her feelings from those around her, had shown her most unmistakably the real state of her heart,—to the effect that notwithstanding all she believed injurious to Deveril, his image still retained a too powerful hold upon her affections. And that it was so, had speedily received a farther corroboration in the sudden thrill of wild delight that she felt, blended for the moment even with a still wilder hope, when the intelligence had reached her that after all Deveril was not dead but merely wounded: and day after day had she watched the newspapers for a line indicative of his state. The duel having created a great sensation, in consequence of the aristocratic rank of one of the principals, the public journals had devoted more than ordinary attention to it,—the state of Mr. Deveril's health being daily chronicled until he was pronounced convalescent. By these means Florina had been duly informed in respect to the details of Deveril's progress towards recovery; and all the various phases of feeling through which she was thus led, convinced the lady that her happiness was more profoundly wrapped up in this love of her's than she could have supposed after the proofs she had received of Deveril's presumed infidelity.

We have thus, at a rapid glance, filled up the interval in respect to the young lady's sentiments and feelings from the period of the duel until the time of which we are speaking; and now we behold her walking in the garden of Saxondale Castle, plunged into a profound and melancholy reverie. She saw that Mr. Hawkshaw was paying his court to Juliana; and she supposed that the latter loved him in return. This belief tended to sadden her even still more deeply: for she reflected that others were happy in their love, while she was miserable. With the utmost abhorrence did she look forward to her alliance with Edmund Saxondale; and though she had not the courage to tell her aunt that it was equivalent to a death-sentence thus to doom her to become the wife of such a being, she felt in her own heart that she never could consent to so tremendous a self-sacrifice. Oh! if Deveril had proved all she at one time hoped and fancied!——but no: that dream of bliss was gone —that vision of happiness appeared to have fled for ever!

After wandering slowly and mournfully about the gardens for upwards of an hour, Florina seated herself in an arbour at the extremity of the avenue where Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had roamed together the evening before. The sun was ascending towards its meridian—the heat out of the shade was stifling: but there, beneath that umbrageous canopy, a grateful freshness prevailed. The arbour was situated close by a line of low palings which bounded the garden; and beyond stretched the wide park with its groups of stately trees and the deer frisking on their carpet of verdure. A silence, broken only by the warblings of the birds, reigned around: but Florina's soul imbibed not solace nor peace from this serenity.

"Alas!" she said, giving audible expression to her thoughts, "mine is an unhappy destiny; and dismal indeed is the prospect of my life. Oh! for an instant what radiant happiness appeared to be shining around me: I felt as if I were experiencing the glories of another sphere. It is hard—too hard to have seen the storm-clouds gather suddenly over the brightness of that heaven, and all my hopes wither away as flowers in a pestilential blight. Ah, William Deveril! wherefore did I ever love thee? wherefore was I doomed to experience thy treachery?"

"No, Florina—no! By heaven, I am incapable of treachery!"

Such were the words, in the manly melody of a well-known voice, that suddenly sounded upon her ears: and the next instant William Deveril was at her feet.

For a moment Florina sat astounded: then abruptly rising with a sudden recovery of all her maiden dignity, she was about to move away from the spot, when Deveril cried in a tone of anguished excitement, "Hear me, I beseech you—even if you condemn me afterwards! I am innocent—as there is an eternal God above us, I am innocent!"

Florina stood rivetted to the spot. There was such a depth of sincerity in the youth's tone and looks—his fine black eyes shone, too, with an expression of such frankness and candour, that she felt it would be indeed hard not to hear him. And then again, there was the hope—the suddenly excited hope—that he might possibly be enabled to explain everything. Yes: and more than this too—there was the extraordinary beauty of his person, rendered delicately interesting by the effects of the duel; so that Florina had not the heart to tear herself away. She became pale and agitated, struggling to maintain a dignified reserve, yet experiencing a melting tenderness of the soul which increased every moment.

"You will hear me!" said Deveril, rising from the one knee on which he had bent; "and upon whatsoever terms we may part, I shall at least take away your good opinion with me!"

"Is this possible?" asked Florina, in a tremulous voice, while her heart fluttered like an imprisoned bird.

"Possible?" echoed Deveril. "I will give you proofs incontestible that the allegations of Lady Saxondale involved a detestable calumny."

"And these proofs?" said Florina, her looks proving how deeply she hoped that he might be enabled to fulfil his words.

"They are here!" he at once responded, drawing a document from his pocket. "Know you not that I have threatened Lady Saxondale with an action at law for the defamation of my character? You look surprised! But of course she would not tell you this. Ah! if you knew all the wickedness of that woman——"

"You will admit, Mr. Deveril," interrupted Florina, "that as I am now receiving the hospitality of Lady Saxondale, it ill becomes me to listen to any aspersions that may be thrown out against her without adequate proof."

"Ah! you saw that I hesitated to place this document in your hands!" he exclaimed, still retaining the paper: and he looked cruelly bewildered. "Take it," he said after a few moments hesitation, "and read it if you will—but I warn you before hand, that you will behold therein something that will shock you in respect to one who is nearly and closely connected with you."

"Heavens! what do you mean?" cried Florina. "You frighten me. To whom do you allude?"

"Must I indeed tell you? Yes, yes: I see that I must. I cannot bear your suspicions any longer—I must clear up my own character at any risk—at any sacrifice! Florina, prepare yourself to hear something terrible——"

"Oh! what new misfortune is in store for me?" murmured the poor girl, sinking back upon the seat whence she had risen. "Of whom is it that I am to hear such dread intelligence?"

"Of your brother—of Lord Harold Staunton."

"My brother!"

"Yes. It was by the cruel and artful—aye, the satanic instigation of Lady Saxondale, that he provoked me to that duel——"

"William, if this be true," cried Florina, bursting into tears, "how immense is the reparation which you ought to receive from me!"

"It *is* true—it is, alas, too true!" responded Deveril. "That kind-hearted and benevolent gentleman, Mr. Gunthorpe, has succeeded in unravelling the whole skein of treachery. But by heaven, Florina, I entertain as little ill-will against your brother as it is possible for man to experience after such wrongs as mine! For *your* sake do I forgive him—for *your* sake will I clasp him by the hand ——yes, and throw the veil of oblivion over what he has done! It must have been under the influence of an infatuation against which he could not wrestle, that he consented to become the instrument of that woman's vengeance. She sought my life—she wished me removed from her path—and she found in your brother a too ready agent!"

"But these accusations are terrible, Mr. Deveril!" exclaimed Florina, cruelly bewildered.

"Read this!" she said, now placing the document in her hands. "It is the statement of an important witness who will appear against Lady Saxondale, should she push matters to extremes and drive me into the law-courts."

Florina mechanically took the paper—opened it—and commenced reading. It recited all the incidents in connexion with the masquerade, which are already known to the reader—how Lady Saxondale went thither in a particular dress to keep a previously given appointment with Lord Harold Staunton—how she had enlisted him in her service to provoke an enemy of her's to a duel, in which that enemy was to be slain—how Staunton had next morning received the note containing the name of *William Deveril*—how he had provoked Deveril to the duel—how Lady Saxondale had subsequently repudiated the whole proceeding, ignoring every detail—but how through Edmund's agency the masquerade dress which she had worn was disinterred from the plate-chest in her private apartments.

It was with a swimming of the brain, a whirl of the thoughts, and an augmenting confusion in all her ideas, that Florina perused this document. It was, too, with a kind of mechanical power that she read on to the end; and it was also with a mechanical tenacity that she held it in her hands. We may add that it was with an unaccountable fascination she kept her eyes upon a document which contained facts so damnatory to her own brother! Deveril watched her with the profoundest commiseration. Oh! it went to his heart's core to wound her gentle bosom thus: and there was a moment when he felt inclined to snatch the paper from her hands and bid her read no more. But it was the only means of vindicating himself; and painful as the proceeding was, he dared not arrest it.

"You may deem me cruel—even implacable, Lady Florina Staunton," he said, when he observed that she had finished, "in submitting this dreadful history to your notice: but what alternative had I? When last I saw you, it was on the same evening that your brother provoked me to the duel: you would not hear me—you retreated from the balcony in anger—and I felt that I was condemned unjustly."

"Ah, Mr. Deveril!" said Florina, the tears streaming down her cheeks: "you have indeed much cause to reproach my brother—and it is but too clear that Lady Saxondale is an infamous woman—that her tale against you was an odious calumny—and that she would not have stopped short even at the instigation of a murder to wreak her revenge! But, alas, I dare not say that I can give you back that love—that confidence——"

"Lady Florina Staunton," interrupted Deveril in a firm and dignified manner—while his tall slender form, modelled with so much Apollo-like grace and elegance, was drawn up to its full height, and his short upper lip expressed the hauteur of offended pride: "have the goodness to recollect that at the very outset of this interview, I said that on whatsoever terms we might part, I could not fail to bear away your good opinion. You honoured me—you flattered me—you made me happy, with an avowal of your love some short time back; and I believed that it was sincere. A tale of calumny naturally excited you against me. I have now vindicated myself—and your good opinion must be restored. But if, during the interval which has elapsed since you avowed your love and accepted the avowal of mine, you have repented of what perhaps after all was only a momentary weakness on your part—if, as I presume, the high-born Lady Florina Staunton in her calmer moments has shrunk

from the idea of allying her fate with that of the humble and obscure artist from Italy—then be it so: but let there be candour in your speech! I give you back your vows—I give you back your pledges: and yet vindicated and innocent as I now stand before you, I have a right to claim them if I would. But no. More generous than you, Florina—more ready, too, to make any or every sacrifice for your sake—I will insist upon nothing that shall menace your happiness. No:"—and here his voice trembled—he murmured a few words which were inaudible, suffocated as they were by the strength of this emotions—and he was hurrying abruptly away.

"Mr. Deveril!" exclaimed Florina, suddenly wiping the tears from her eyes—for she had been weeping while he spoke: "we must not part thus. "You have become the accuser——But I also have something to say in justification of myself!"

Deveril turned back; and with an air of melancholy composure, in which there was a certain blending of his own offended dignity, he stood in front of Florina as she was seated upon the bench in the arbour.

"Had Lady Saxondale's story," she resumed, in a tremulous voice, "been the only cause of annoyance which I felt in respect to yourself, you would not have vainly sought an opportunity for explanation on that evening when you beheld me in the balcony of my aunt's house. Indeed, to give you a proof of my anxiety to seek such explanation—at the same time too," she added in accents more low and tremulous still, "to afford you a proof of the sincerity of that affection which I had avowed for you—I took a step which the world would have deemed most unmaidenly, and for the imprudence of which I was indeed but too severely punished! In the evening of the same day on which Lady Saxondale brought her calumny to my aunt's house, I stole forth, resolving to visit you at your own abode—to tell you all that I had heard, and to beseech an explanation——"

"Ah! you did this?" exclaimed Deveril, hope and joy suddenly lighting up his countenance. "Then you loved me—you really loved me? But wherefore did you not come? why did you turn back? what prevented you from carrying out your generous intention? Oh, what misery might have been spared to me!"

Florina gazed in astonishment upon the radiantly handsome countenance of William Deveril as he commenced this speech: but as she recollected all she heard and saw at his dwelling on that fatal night, she could not help again thinking that this was another evidence of his matchless effrontery—and she felt pained and shocked at the thought that it could be so.

"I did *not* turn back on that occasion, Mr. Deveril," she said in a cold calm voice. "I was *not* deterred by any circumstance, nor prevented by any accident from repairing to your abode near the Regent's Park. I entered the garden—the front door stood open—I heard what I will not repeat—and immediately after I saw what I will not allude to more. But it was all enough to convince me that while you were pretending that your heart was wholly mine——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Deveril, a light suddenly breaking in upon him: "I understand it all! Oh,—cruel and fatal mistake! Florina, you heard and saw——"

"Angela Vivaldi."

"My sister!"

A cry of wild delight thrilled from Florina's lips; and precipitating herself into Deveril's arms, she sobbed upon his breast, murmuring, "Pardon me—forgive me—dearest, dearest William!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

WILLIAM DEVERIL'S HISTORY.

The world has many delights—human feelings may experience many pleasures—the hearts of earth's denizens sometimes thrill with ineffable raptures. But what joy—Oh! what joy, can compare with that which attends upon the reconciliation of lovers? When the dark clouds of jealousy have gathered over the heaven of a young maiden's prospects, how sweet—Oh! how sweet, is it for that gentle heart of her's to find them dispelled all in a moment, and the sun of hope bursting forth to gild another day and illume another state of being. The world has no ecstacy superior to this.

Such was the delight experienced by Lady Florina Staunton at that announcement which, falling upon her ears like an angel-voice speaking to a soul in the depths of despair, cleared up the past mystery in a moment. And Deveril—was not he also happy? Again and again did he press that being of transcendent beauty in his arms—he covered her brow, her cheeks, and her lips with kisses—then seating himself upon the bench, he placed her by his side and keeping both her hands locked in his own, he gazed upon her with the prolonged look of ineffable rapture.

Thus did they sit together, gazing upon each other in profound silence for many minutes. Their's was a joy—deep, elysian, ineffable—which appeared almost too holy for the interruption of words. But if their tongues were silent, most eloquently expressive were their looks: love shone in the deep clear blue of Florina's eyes and glowed upon the purity of her complexion;—and love too beamed in the dark orbs and tinted the cheeks of that youth of manly beauty. Yes—the cheeks which illness had left so pale, were now animated with the bright colours in which love paints the reflection of the heart's feelings: and perhaps that was the happiest moment of William Deveril's life.

"How cruel—how unjust I have been to you, dearest William!" murmured Florina, at length breaking silence. "Oh, if on that day when I saw you from the balcony at my aunt's house, I had only waited to hear the explanation you so kindly and generously came to give, what anguish—what misery might have been spared us both!"

"Do not reproach yourself now, my beloved Florina," returned Deveril, pressing her hand to his lips: "the happiness which I enjoy at this moment, is a recompense for the past. And I do not blame you—not for an instant do I blame you! Appearances were so much against me. But how could I possibly have suspected that *other* incident which has just been cleared up! Oh, it was indeed a proof of love on your part to seek me at my own dwelling."

"Heavens! when I think of all you have gone through," resumed Florina—and she still spoke in a murmuring tremulous voice, while the tears again streamed down her cheeks,—"it is enough to drive me mad. Stretched upon what was deemed your death-bed—believing that I no longer loved you—smarting under the calumnies which an infamous woman had spread concerning you——Oh! it was too much—it was too much, William—dear William! All the love I bear you, immense as it is, can scarcely prove an atonement—a recompense!"

"Again I beseech you, dearest Florina, not to torture yourself thus. Let us hope that happy days await us. In the depth of my own bitter sorrows, there were not wanting some consolations. My sister Angela—an angel in disposition as well as in name—was ever by my bedside; and that kind-hearted excellent friend, Mr. Gunthorpe, was unwearied in his attentions. You know him, Florina—you have seen him; and he has the highest opinion of you. He is acquainted with the secret of our love; and I know not whether it could be to sooth my wounded spirit, or whether it were that he had really some design of his own to be worked out,—but certain it is that with the tone of the fullest confidence he bade me to despair not—for you should yet be mine!"

"And I will," murmured Florina, the carnation again deepening upon her cheeks, and her beauteous eyes being modestly bent down; then as a sudden thought struck her, she looked up, and with a paroxysm of indignation, exclaimed, "To be sacrificed to the son of that bold, bad woman, Lady Saxondale—no—never, never!"

"And Mr. Gunthorpe declares that you shall never be so sacrificed," rejoined William; "though what means he may have, or hope to have, in throwing any influence into the scale, it is impossible for me to comprehend."

"He is an intimate friend of my uncle the Marquis of Eagledean," observed Florina suggestively; "and perhaps he intends to invoke his lordship's interference."

"It may be so," said Deveril. "It was in accordance with his counsel—and I need scarcely add with my own earnest desire—that so soon as I was sufficiently recovered, I resolved upon making another attempt to procure an interview with you. Mr. Gunthorpe by some means ascertained that you and Lady Macdonald, together with Lord Harold, had suddenly been invited to pay a visit to Saxondale Castle; and he hurried me off the day before yesterday. By accident I formed the acquaintance of a young man who lives in Gainsborough; and with him as my guide, I came yesterday into the vicinage of the Castle to take a view of the grounds, and see whether there would be the chance of throwing myself in your way should you happen to walk forth alone. This morning I returned hither in that hope; and, thank heaven, it has not been frustrated. But, dearest Florina, I think it would be prudent if you were to do your best to conceal from Lady Saxondale for the present the circumstance that you are acquainted with her infamy. Mr. Gunthorpe recommends and enjoins this. I do not exactly know what his motives are; but he has assuredly good reasons for the advice he gives. He does not believe that Lady Saxondale will suffer law-proceedings to be instituted against her on my account: but if she be obstinate, Mr. Gunthorpe will do his best to spare your brother from as much share in the infamy as possible."

"Oh! William, I can no longer think of him as a brother!" exclaimed Florina, weeping. "And yet it is hard to be compelled to speak thus!"

"If I forgive him, my well-beloved," responded Deveril, "you cannot refuse to do so. But is it not strange that Lady Saxondale should have included him in this invitation to Lady Macdonald and yourself?"

"The evening before last, soon after our arrival," said Florina, thoughtfully, "Harold and her ladyship walked for an hour together in the garden. They were alone—and yesterday morning Harold departed suddenly for London again."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Deveril. "Depend upon it he has undertaken some fresh mission for her ladyship."

"Oh, my deluded, beguiled, unhappy brother!"

"An idea strikes me," continued Deveril. "Doubtless it is in connexion with this threatened law-suit: for her ladyship has received a letter from her solicitors to the effect that an appeal to the tribunals was menaced. But fear nothing. Whatsoever Harold may undertake will most probably become known to Mr. Gunthorpe. The person whose name attests that document which you have read, is in Mr. Gunthorpe's pay, Do not be afraid that this *espionnage* instituted upon your brother's actions, is for any evil purpose. No, no—Mr. Gunthorpe is incapable of wrong-doing: he is the most excellent of men."

"Since you have such perfect confidence in him, William, I must have the same. And notwithstanding my brother Harold treated him superciliously on the first night he introduced himself to us—it was at the Opera—I was prepossessed in the old gentleman's favour."

"He failed not to observe your kindness, Florina, in contrast with Harold's rudeness."

"And Angela Vivaldi—that beautiful creature whose very form is the embodiment of poesy—Angela Vivaldi is your sister?"

"She is; and I am proud of her—but for reasons which I will presently explain, we avoid appearing before the world in the light of brother and sister. Although in that sphere the very air of which is generally believed to be full of blight for female virtue, yet she is purity itself. Oh! Florina, if on that night when you visited my abode, no circumstances had transpired to fill you with suspicions and drive you away from my threshold,—if you had crossed that threshold—if you had entered my home, you would not have disdained to give your hand to the celebrated Opera-dancer. You would have seen that her very look is chastity and innocence—that she is a being of a superior order—and that in manners and conduct she is the elegant and well-bred woman. You have seen her upon the stage: did you ever observe her cast a glance inconsistent with immaculate modesty?"

"No—never, never," replied Florina. "Angela Vivaldi's virtue was proverbial; and you may conceive the shock that it gave me when under a fearful combination of circumstances, I was led to believe everything injurious alike to her and to you. But is *she* also acquainted with our secret? Of

course she must be: it is natural you should have told her."

"I preserved that secret religiously until it transpired as one of the consequences of the duel. Yes—I preserved it for your sake, Florina; because I deemed it to be a secret of so solemn a character that it ought not to be revealed, even to a sister, until you should vouchsafe the permission. I considered it to be *your* secret even more than *mine*, because I knew how you were situated in respect to Edmund Saxondale, and I thought it best to retain everything closely locked up in my own heart until you, in your own good time, should have told me that there was no longer need for such secrecy."

"You are all kindness and consideration, William, as you are all that is generous and noble," said Florina, with affection beaming in her beauteous blue eyes; and as she gazed upon her lover her countenance reflected the emotions that swelled in her soul deeper and happier than she had ever yet experienced in her whole life—unless an exception must be made for that day on which this love of her's was first avowed and the reciprocal passion confessed.

"When forced into that duel," resumed Deveril, "and seeing myself standing as it were face to face with death, I adopted those measures which prudence and my own honour demanded. I wrote several letters, to be delivered in case I fell. One was to you, Florina—assuring you of mine innocence as well as of my love, and beseeching that you would sometimes bestow a thought on him whose heart had been so devotedly your's."

"O William! what must you have suffered!"—and the beautiful creature threw her arms round his neck and kissed him of her own accord: but as she withdrew her countenance again, she left upon his cheeks the tears that had started from her blue eyes.

"Am I not now fully recompensed?" exclaimed Deveril, with enthusiastic fondness. "But let me continue. Another letter was to my sister Angela, bidding her the tenderest farewells; and a third was to Mr. Gunthorpe. In this letter I gave him the fullest explanation how I had been provoked to a duel by Lord Harold Staunton; and I revealed to him the secret of my devoted love for you—beseeching that in case I fell, he would personally become the bearer of the letter which I had written to you, my sweet Florina,—so that he might tell you all he knew of my character and help to corroborate the assurances I had penned of my innocence towards Lady Saxondale. For two days after the duel I remained insensible of what was passing around. Mr. Gunthorpe, visiting my lodgings in Pall Mall, in pursuance of an intimation which he received from my second, Mr. Forester, found the letters and perused the one addressed to himself. Thus was it, Florina, that he discovered the secret of our love."

"But wherefore did he not bring to me the letter which you had written, and which was intended for me?" asked Florina.

"Because the express injunction was penned by my hand upon the envelope to the effect that it was only to be delivered in case I should fall in the duel."

"Oh! if that horror had taken place!"—and the fair young creature shuddered with a cold tremor from head to foot at the bare idea.

"To possess your sympathy and your love, is sweet beyond description—it is paradise ineffable!"—and again did William Deveril press the young maiden to his heart. "Think you, sweet Florina," he continued after a pause, "that your absence from the Castle will be noticed? think you that there is any danger of our being intruded upon?"

"No: my aunt will not come out this morning—Miss Farefield has gone to ride with a gentleman of the neighbourhood—and Lady Saxondale intimated after breakfast that she should be occupied for several hours in writing letters."

"If, then, we may safely enjoy another half-hour of each other's society," said Deveril, "I will narrate to you a few incidents connected with myself and Angela. This is the time, my beloved Florina, for the fullest confidence."

"I shall listen," responded the young lady, "with a most heartfelt interest. Everything that regards you, William, is now of consequence to me. If you have sorrows to speak of, I can sympathize with them: and if you tell me of joys and reminiscences of past happiness, I can share the delights accompanying your retrospection."

"You will not expect to hear, Florina, that I am of good family or of gentle birth," resumed Deveril; "and it was perhaps some little false pride on my part that prevented me from proffering certain explanations on that memorable and happy day when you first suffered me to know that I loved you not in vain. I had it on the tip of my tongue to tell you that Angela was my sister; but I knew you not *then* as I know you *now*, and I feared that it might shock those lofty notions in which you have been reared—and I at all events thought it better to reserve that and other explanations until another occasion. Had I been more candid,—or rather had I *then* appreciated as I ought to have done the generosity of your nature, which enables you to rise superior to the artificial conventionalisms of aristocratic circles, — how much unhappiness would have been spared us both! However, the past cannot be recalled, much as it may be regretted; and I will now tell you my story."

"Proceed, dearest William," said Florina: "I am all attention."

"My earliest reminiscences," commenced Deveril, "are connected with a troop of strolling players, to which company my father and mother belonged. Their name was Deveril. I am about a year older than my sister Angela; and I recollect that in her infancy she was one of the most beautiful little cherubs that ever constituted a parent's joy. Although in such humble circumstances—exposed to all the sad vicissitudes of a strolling life—our father and mother were exceedingly kind to us, and treated us with the tenderest affection. They were superior people in their way. My mother had belonged to a respectable family; but by marrying a poor clerk, as my father at first was, she was altogether discarded by her relatives and friends. My father was one of those gay thoughtless men who cannot appreciate the value of money: and with but a very small salary and a wife to keep, he fell into difficulties. Unable to pay his debts, and threatened with a prison, he absconded from his native town, his loving wife being the partner of his flight. From what I have often heard him say, I am but too well aware that he and my mother must have

endured great privations and gone through incalculable sufferings; for being unable to refer to his last situation, he failed to procure another. In short, dire necessity drove them both to join a troop of strolling players; and as my father was a very handsome man, and my mother a most beautiful woman, they were received into the troop more on account of their personal attractions than for any histrionic talents which they possessed. Notwithstanding my mother's great beauty and the temptations to which as a poor actress she was constantly exposed, I feel proud in being enabled to pay this tribute to her memory, by assuring you that her character was retained unimpeachable until the last. During her leisure hours she instructed me and Angela in the rudiments of education: for she herself had been well educated. She died when I was about eight years old; and I recollect how bitter was my grief. Nor did little Angela fail to appreciate even more keenly than might be expected in a child of her age, the great loss we had sustained. My father was inconsolable; and for some weeks he was utterly unable to pursue his professional avocations. The consequence was that penury and want entered our little lodging, and our sufferings were great."

Here Florina pressed her lover's hand between both her own, and gazed upon him with tearful looks. The glances that he bent upon her in return were full of affectionate gratitude for the sympathy which she thus mutely but eloquently testified; and his narrative was continued in the following terms:—

"Necessity compelled my father to subdue his grief as much as he was able, and appear again upon the stage. The very first night that he thus came forth again in some large provincial town—I forget which—his fine person attracted the notice of an eminent Italian painter who was on a visit to this country for the purpose of beholding the progress of its arts and sciences. He was at that particular period making a tour in the provinces; and accident led him to visit the theatre on the special occasion referred to. On the following day he made inquiries for my father's abode—called, and represented that if my father would accompany him back to Italy, he would be sure to make a good income by serving as a model for painters and sculptors. Signor Vivaldi—for that was the name of the Italian—offered to pay all the travelling expenses for my father and his children; and in short, behaved so liberally that his proposal was accepted. We accordingly repaired to Italy, and took up our abode in Florence, Signor Vivaldi's native city. The promises which he had held out, were fully realized; and my father earned a competency. Signor Vivaldi was an elderly man; and though he obtained large prices for his pictures, yet he had a number of profligate relations dependent upon him, and to whom he was too kind—and thus he was always poor. My father had become quite a steady man, and learnt to appreciate the value of money. He gave myself and Angela an excellent education,—taking pride indeed to economize as much as possible with regard to his own expenditure, that he might accomplish this. His great aim, and indeed his ruling idea, was to make a splendid dancer of Angela. The taste which she had exhibited for the art even from her childhood, had probably suggested this thought: and accordingly, as she grew up, the best masters in the Terpsichorean art were engaged to render her proficient. Meanwhile Signor Vivaldi had taken a great fancy to me, and was accustomed to have me at his *studio* during my leisure hours to teach me his own art. At that period painting in fast colours upon ivory was greatly in vogue in the Tuscan States; and I acquired a taste for this beautiful study. It was somewhat out of the way of Signor Vivaldi's genius; but still, as a great artist, his suggestions were most valuable; and under his supervision I copied with some success his own fine pictures on miniature ivory-plates. Thus was it that time passed on until two years back, when I reached the age of about seventeen, and my sister was consequently sixteen. At this period a terrible calamity occurred to us. Our father was smitten with paralysis, which from the very first threatened to prove fatal. For two or three weeks he was unconscious of everything that passed around him; but at length he rallied somewhat, and partially recovered the use of his speech. I am now about to speak of his death-bed: for the flaming up of life's lamp was only a transient glow ere it suddenly became extinguished for ever. Ah! full well do I recollect that final scene! It was midnight—the candles were burning in the chamber, so soon to be that of death—the physicians were on one side of the couch—Angela and myself were on the other. Our poor father, who in his last moments completely recovered his intellect and partially his voice, intimated that he had some important secret to reveal. As he thus spoke he fixed his eyes earnestly upon me, and gave me to understand that it was specially with regard to myself that he had to speak. But a sudden dimness came upon his eyes—his countenance grew convulsed—it was evident that he battled with all his remaining energies against the Destroyer in order that he might gain a few moments' respite to reveal the secret to which he had alluded. But death's grasp was fixed too powerfully upon him: he merely gave utterance to a few words, of which '*strolling players*' ——'*manager*'——'*Thompson*'——'*could tell all*' —were alone distinguishable: and then he gave up the ghost."

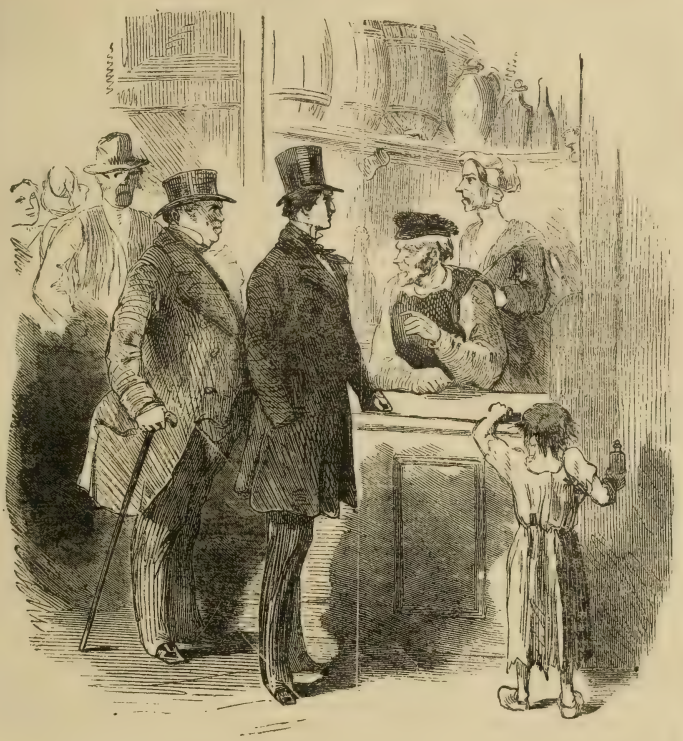
Here William Deveril paused; and tears started from his eyes as he mournfully pondered upon that death-scene, now so vividly brought back to his memory. Florina pressed his hand in silence. She felt that his sorrow was too sacred to be intruded upon by words; but her looks and her tears also showed how much she sympathized with her lover.

"Whatever my father's secret might have been," he at length resumed, "it appears to have died with him—unless indeed the few unconnected words which my ear managed to catch up in his last moments, should ever serve as a clue to the development of the mystery. What the secret could be, or how it might affect me more than Angela, I could not possibly conjecture—nor can I now. It is useless therefore to dwell upon it. The remains of our poor father were interred in the picturesque cemetery outside the walls of Florence; and Angela and I mingled our tears over the grave of the departed. But we were not without friends to succour and console us. In consequence of the expensive education which our father had given us, he died poor. In-

deed, when the funeral expenses were paid, I and Angela found ourselves almost penniless, and it yet required another six months' constant practice to fit her for the sphere for which she had been brought up—I mean the operatic ballet. Signor Vivaldi however assisted us. He paid for the masters whose services were required to finish Angela's Terpsichorean education; and he continued, with more assiduity than ever, to instruct me in the art of ivory painting. Thus several months passed; and at length I became so far proficient in my own studies that I was enabled to dispose of my little paintings to considerable advantage. O Florina! never did I eat bread so sweet as that which was purchased with the produce of the sale of my first ivory-plate. I felt that I was independent, even of friendly benevolence; and this feeling for those who have been placed in a situation to appreciate it, is a joyous one indeed. At the same time, too, my dear sister had finished her education as a dancer, and was to appear upon the stage. By the advice of her masters, as well as of Signor Vivaldi and other friends who had interested themselves on our behalf, it was determined that she should adopt an Italian name for her *debut;* because, if it were generally known that she was an English girl, there would be a prejudice against her. I do not mean that this prejudice would have arisen from any national aversion against the English generally—but simply from the fact that the Italians entertain the belief that the English cannot possibly excel, no matter how well tutored, in dancing, singing, or music. Therefore, for this reason, it was resolved that Angela should assume an Italian surname, the Christian one which a mother's doting fondness had given her being sufficiently Italian to be preserved. As a compliment to our kind friend the painter, and by his special permission, she adopted that of Vivaldi. Her *debut* was not so successful as her friends had hoped and expected it would be: still it was not a failure. She could not throw off that natural timidity which was so closely connected with the innocence of her character and the purity of her soul; and thus she failed to do justice to the real powers and qualifications which she possessed as a dancer. Some months passed, and she continued to improve in respect to conquering her timidity —but slowly. At length it happened that the manager of the Italian Opera in London arrived in Florence; and being much struck with Angela's appearance, as well as perhaps foreseeing the certainty of her future fame, he sought us out at our dwelling and offered her an engagement. She did not however accept it hurriedly: for in Florence we had good friends and I had found many patrons, so that we were ensured a competency—whereas if we renounced present certainties with the uncertain hope of more brilliant prospects, we felt that we should be acting unwisely and rashly. We therefore declined making terms with the English manager on Angela's account, but promised that if on a future occasion he still entertained the same favourable opinion of Angela's qualifications, his proposal should be the first accepted elsewhere than in Florence. The flattering compliment paid to Angela by the mere circumstance of the English manager's offer, inspired her with new courage to prosecute the career in which she had embarked; and when the season at Florence commenced again, she acquitted herself in a manner that was most triumphant. From that day forth her success was immense and her reputation was established. But at the period of which I am now speaking, a circumstance occurred which threw a sad damp upon our spirits: this was the death of our kind benefactor Signor Vivaldi. He died in comparative poverty, and leaving some debts. He had left three or four pictures in a finished state, and one that was very nearly completed: these his executors advertised for sale—and when the day came to dispose of them by auction, there was a considerable attendance of bidders at the deceased painter's house. Amongst them was Mr. Gunthorpe, who reading the advertisement in the Italian newspapers, journeyed from Naples—his place of residence—for the purpose."

"What! is Mr. Gunthorpe attached to the fine arts?" asked Florina, with some degree of astonishment, inasmuch as there was little indeed in that gentleman's appearance to warrant such a belief.

"There is no man in Europe who possesses a more exquisite taste," answered Deveril. "He has brought with him to England countless packages containing the most beautiful specimens of Italian arts, in painting and sculpture, that money could purchase; and he intends them for the decoration of a mansion which he purposes to erect or buy But let me continue my story. Mr. Gunthorpe was so pleased with the deceased Signor Vivaldi's pictures, that he outbid every one at the sale, and became their purchaser for a considerable price,—the unfinished one as well those that were complete. This circumstance made me acquainted with him; and on the day after the sale, I happened to be in the *studio* of my deceased benefactor, finishing a miniature copy of the very one which was incomplete when Mr. Gunthorpe came to fetch the pictures away. He inspected my work, and was astonished to find that in my miniature I had perfected that which was still wanting to complete the original. He asked me if I could paint in oil: I told him that I had received some lessons from my departed friend. He inquired whether I would undertake to complete the as yet unfinished picture in the same way as I had perfected my miniature copy? I undertook the task, which occupied some weeks; and every day Mr. Gunthorpe came to my abode, whither I had removed the picture, to watch its progress towards completion. Thus we became still more intimate; and the old gentleman exhibited an increasing friendship towards myself and Angela. At length the picture was finished: he was well satisfied, and offered me a munificent reward. But I refused it, declaring that I had already received an ample recompense in the honour of being permitted to perfect one of my deceased benefactor's masterpieces. Mr. Gunthorpe did not press me very much after my first refusal to accept the proffered remuneration: but he became more friendly than ever towards me. At length, after an interval of secession from the stage as a tribute of respect to the memory of our deceased friend, Angela resumed her occupations. Mr. Gunthorpe went to see her, and was delighted. We informed him of the proposals made by the English manager; and he at once counselled Angela to accept them. He farther observed that he himself was shortly coming to England, and would be delighted to renew his



acquaintance with us there. He then took his departure from Florence; and we regretted him—for he had been a great favourite with us. Negotiations were at once opened with the English manager, and an engagement was effected on the most liberal terms for my sister. Although it still wanted many months to the Opera season in London, we nevertheless resolved to proceed to England at once; and to this step we were induced by several reasons. In the first place we were both so young on leaving the country that many of its habits and customs had been lost to our recollection: and it was quite requisite that Angela should render herself familiar therewith, in order that she might not experience a recurrence of her timidity on finding herself too suddenly in the presence of a strange people. Moreover we had both for some time past experienced a yearning to visit our native land; and I had also heard that the art of painting on ivory having been just introduced into fashionable circles as an amusement for young ladies, there would be ample scope for the exercise of whatsoever little talent I might possess therein. I was also desirous of instituting some inquiries in respect to the words my father had uttered on his death-bed. We accordingly proceeded at once to England; but by the advice of the manager of the Opera—indeed, by his express stipulation—Angela retained her self-given name of Vivaldi. In respect to myself it being considered that the circumstance of my sister being a dancer might prove a barrier to my admission into the wealthy families with whom my art was alone available, it was resolved to retain our close affinity as secret as possible. I therefore took that secluded villa near the Regent's Park as our private residence, and engaged chambers in Pall Mall as my ostensible abode and for my professional avocations. At the villa Angela and I dwelt in almost complete seclusion,—such being our taste and our preference. Thus months passed on; and

at length within a few days of the opening of the Opera, Mr. Gunthorpe arrived in London. By inquiry of the manager he found out where we were residing: for in the general interdiction against Angela's address being given at the theatre to anybody, a special exception was made in favour of our old friend. You know with what success my sister made her *debut* in London, and how she has achieved a succession of triumphs. Once more referring to that unfortunate affair of the duel, I must observe that Mr. Gunthorpe discovered it was to take place, and came upon the ground to prevent it. You can have no difficulty, in conjecturing, my dear Florina, from whom he obtained the information. I was compelled on that morning to suffer the kind old gentleman to undergo some indignity on the part of the seconds in the duel: they bound him to a gate in order to prevent his interference But had I acted in his defence, I should have incurred the risk of being proclaimed a coward, and my intervention on his part would have been ascribed to a desire on my own to escape the duel. During the week that I lay so dangerously ill in consequence of my wound, Angela did not appear at the Opera, the apology being a severe indisposition. And now, Florina, I have told you everything that regards myself: I have not concealed from you my humble parentage——"

"And if possible," murmured the beauteous creature, "I love you all the more for your candour. But those mysterious words which your father uttered upon his death-bed, seem to ring in my ears as if I myself had heard them."

"And I also think of them often," responded Deveril. "It would seem as if a person of the name of Thompson, the manager of a strolling troop—most probably that to which my parents at the time belonged—is acquainted with the secret to which my father alluded in his last moments. You may be sure that immediately on my arrival in England I instituted inquiries amongst persons acquainted with dramatic affairs, to ascertain if this Thompson could be heard of. I also inserted some advertisements in the newspapers, requesting him to communicate his address; and, if needful, he should be liberally rewarded. But the steps I thus took all proved vain; and therefore am I fearful that my father's secret has died with him."

At this moment the clock over the entrance-tower of Saxondale Castle proclaimed one; and the lovers were thus made aware that they had been full two hours together. Almost immediately afterwards the bell rang for luncheon; and Florina, starting from the seat, exclaimed, "We must separate now, dear William! for if I do not answer that summons, a domestic will be sent to inform me that luncheon is served up."

"How long, think you, dearest Florina, that you will stay at Saxondale Castle?" asked Deveril.

"The invitation was for some weeks," she responded: "but if I must dissimulate my aversion and horror of Lady Saxondale, it will be impossible to play the hypocrite so long. I could not do such violence to my feelings——"

"Perhaps circumstances may transpire to abridge your visit," said Deveril. "For instance, if Mr. Gunthorpe should advise, after all that has passed between you and me to-day, that everything which we have learnt concerning Lady Saxondale should be made known to your aunt——for remember Mr. Gunthorpe is, as he informed me, the intimate friend of your uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, and he may therefore feel himself justified in interfering to save you and Lady Macdonald from the contamination of Lady Saxondale's society——"

"In that case," ejaculated Florina, "my aunt would flee away in a moment. She is a good woman, though worldly-minded, but upright and conscientious."

"We shall see what will happen," said Deveril. "Meanwhile you *must*, dear Florina, dissemble your feelings towards Lady Saxondale, whatsoever amount of violence you may do yourself. And now farewell for the present, my well-beloved! To-morrow I must return to London."

"Farewell, dearest William—farewell."

The lovers embraced tenderly and affectionately, and then separated.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE ACCIDENT AND THE RESCUE.

WILLIAM DEVERIL scaled the low fence, traversed the park, and by making a small circuit, regained the river's bank, which not only led towards Gainsborough, but likewise constituted the most agreeable walk: for he thereby avoided the dusty highway. He had come on foot in order to avoid exciting suspicion by the presence of a vehicle waiting in the neighbourhood; and thus he had a good walk of some few miles before him. He was still rather too enfeebled from the effects of the duel to take so much exercise: but what fatigues would he not have dared in order to obtain an interview with Florina!—and what weariness was there that could not be compensated for by the delicious reflections inspired by all that had just taken place!

Indeed, our young hero felt as if he were altogether a new being. Never had his heart felt so light—never had his spirits seemed so buoyant. A new strength appeared to invigorate him: he felt as if entering entirely upon another phase of existence.

As he was proceeding along the bank of the river enjoying the luxury of his reflections, he observed a strange-looking woman approaching from the contrary direction. She was dressed in a sordid slovenly manner—indeed, wretchedly clad: a dirty white cap appeared beneath an old straw bonnet; and though it was the middle of summer, she wore a dingy-coloured cloak all tattered round the lower edge. As she drew nearer still, Deveril could not help observing that her features were singularly harsh, coarse, and repulsive; and she had altogether a look of a sinister character.

"I suppose," she said in a grating voice, "that building I see yonder is Saxondale Castle?"

"It is," replied Deveril.

"Thank you for the information," said the woman: and passing him by, she continued her way in the direction of the baronial structure.

Deveril, as he walked on, could not help wondering what that woman wanted at the Castle, and he concluded that she was one of those persons who go about the country seeking the charity of wealthy individuals. But while these thoughts were still

hovering in his mind, it struck him that he heard a sound like a splashing in the water. He stopped short, and looked back. There was a group of trees close upon the edge of the bank, which intercepted his view of the place where the woman ought to be if she were still pursuing her way towards the castle. A cry for help now met his ears; and convinced that some accident had occurred, he rushed back in the way which he had been pursuing. The instant he passed the clump of trees, he beheld the woman struggling in the water; and the next moment she sank, disappearing from his view. Without the slightest hesitation Deveril plunged in, and was immediately out of his depth: for the river was exceedingly deep in that part. He could swim well; but being now much enfeebled through his recent illness, and by the fatigues of the long walk he had been taking, he felt on rising to the surface that he was in a position of great danger. Had he therefore consulted his own safety alone, he would at once have got back to land: but there was a life to be saved, and he was too magnanimous not to risk his own to save it. The woman appeared again upon the surface of the water a little lower down; and a wild cry which she sent forth, rang through the air. Deveril struck out with a vigour which even astonished himself, and was immediately at the spot where she sank. He dived once—twice—thrice, unsuccessfully; and though nearly exhausted, he plunged down a fourth time. His hand clutched a garment—he succeeded in lifting the woman to the surface—she was quite insensible—and in this state he managed to get her forth in safety. But scarcely had he dragged her upon the bank, when a sense of utter exhaustion came over him: he endeavoured to shake it off, but could not—and consciousness abandoned him.

When he awoke to life again, he was in bed in a very small, humble-looking, but neat chamber. He had the taste of some burning spirit in his mouth; and an elderly female, in a peasant-garb, was chafing his hands and temples.

"Ah! now he opens his eyes again," cried the woman, in the joyful tone which indicated a kind and benevolent heart.

"That's all right," said a tall stalwart-looking young peasant, entering from another room at the sound of the woman's voice. "The gin did it—I told you it would, mother."

"Or the chafing and the rubbing—which, John?" said the kind-hearted old creature. "But how does the woman get on?"

"Sister says she's nice enough," returned the peasant. "Pray how do you feel now, sir?"

"Better—thanks to the kind care which I have evidently received here," responded Deveril, to whom the question was addressed: but he spoke in a very weak voice, and he felt that he was indeed much exhausted.

"I suppose it was an accident, sir?" said the peasant.

"Yes: the woman, to whom I presume you have alluded, fell into the river. I succeeded in saving her—but was so enfeebled that I fainted on the bank."

"Don't talk too much, there's a dear young gentleman," said the old woman. "My John was dreadfully alarmed when he saw what he thought was two dead bodies lying on the bank, side by side too: but he soon discovered that you was both alive, though senseless,—so he run back to the cottage, got me and my daughter to go down with him, and between us three we soon got you here safe. John undressed you and got you into bed; and here have I been more than half-an-hour trying to bring you to. I really was afraid at one time it was all up with you."

Deveril could not speak, so heavy was the sense of exhaustion upon him: but his looks showed his gratitude.

"We have put your clothes to dry by the fire," continued the woman, who, if she was discreet enough to bid Deveril not to talk too much, seemed inclined to be garrulous herself: "but I don't think you will be able to move out of this place to-day. If you like to stay here, sir, I am sure you are quite welcome. A gentleman like you that risks his life for a poor gipsy kind of woman as t'other is, deserves every attention—and you will get it here. If you want to send anywhere and tell your friends what's happened and where you are, my son John will hurry off and deliver the message."

Deveril now gained strength enough to reply that he was a mere temporary visitor at Gainsborough, and that there was no necessity for any trouble to be taken on his behalf, unless it were that John should go to the hotel at which he had put up and procure a change of apparel from his portmanteau. Accordingly, provided with the requisite instructions, the sturdy peasant set out on his errand. Soon afterwards Deveril fell into a deep sleep; and when he awoke again, the erubescent beams of the setting sun were shining in the lattice window of the little chamber.

He had thus slept many hours, and was considerably refreshed. John had returned long ago with the garments he had sent for; and the woman of the cottage brought the patient up some good broth which she had prepared for him while he slumbered. He did ample justice to her frugal fare, and felt invigorated by the meal. Nevertheless, as the cottage was three miles distant from Gainsborough, and there was no conveyance without sending thither for one, he resolved upon staying where he was till the morning, in the hope that a good night's rest might restore him. Having thus expressed himself, he inquired relative to the woman whom he had rescued from the river.

"She is up, and as well again as if nothing had happened," was the response, given by the old female of the cottage. "Her clothes were dried by the fire—she has put them on—and would have taken herself off a couple of hours back, only that she said she would remain till you awoke, that she might thank you for risking your own life to save hers."

"She wishes to see me, then?" said Deveril. "You can tell her to come in."

The woman of the cottage first of all drew the little curtain over the window, for it was now dusk; and she then lighted a candle in the room. Deveril raised himself partially on the bolster, and pushed back the cloud of black hair which had intruded upon his noble forehead. He had on a coarse shirt belonging to the peasant; and the collar happening to be deficient in a button, it was all open at the neck. This circumstance Deveril did not perceive; but had a painter or a sculptor been

there at the moment, the beautiful countenance of the youth, his classic-shaped head, and the expression of his features, would have proved a fine study. The complexion of his face was slightly embrowned by a long residence in the Italian clime; but his neck, and so much of his shoulders as the open shirt revealed, were as white as the skin of a woman. One hand rested beneath his head—the other lay outside the bed-clothes. And a beautifully modelled hand was it, with tapering fingers and almond-shaped nails that the fairest scion of the aristocracy might have envied him the possession of.

In a few minutes the door opened, and the woman whom he had rescued from the water made her appearance. She came alone; and shutting the door, sat down by the bed in which Deveril was lying.

"I am not accustomed," she at once began in her harsh disagreeable voice, "to much softness of feeling; but I could not possibly go away without saying that I do possess sufficient to render me grateful for your noble conduct. How do you feel now? Are you better?"

Extraordinary was it that at the very instant the woman asked these questions, Deveril felt a sudden return of that sense of exhaustion which had seized upon him on the river's bank. It was no doubt a faintness produced by the fatigue of sitting up in bed to partake of the food he had eaten, and also by having conversed with the woman of the cottage during the whole time. He murmured that he felt very ill—asked for water—and ere it could be given him, sank off into unconsciousness again.

When he opened his eyes, the woman was bending over him, bathing his head with a wet towel; and in a few minutes he recovered completely. She now gave him a glass of water, and questioned him with an earnestness amounting to even a degree of anxiety as to how he felt. He assured her that he was much better;—and now, as his eyes regained their complete power of vision, and the light of the candle fell upon the woman's countenance, it occurred to him that she was gazing upon him with a singular expression in which interest and curiosity appeared to be blended. Slowly did she resume her seat by the side of the bed; and again she asked if he felt better?

"Yes—much better," he returned. "I do not even feel as if I had so recently experienced a fainting fit again."

"Do you think that without exhausting yourself," inquired the woman, "you could talk to me for a few minutes?"

"No doubt," replied Deveril. "But, my poor creature, I do not wish you to say any more to express your gratitude."

"I am not going to say another word upon the subject. Perhaps I may be enabled to prove by deeds—which are better than words—that I am grateful: for you have saved my life. And who knows but that it was intended for me to trip upon the bank and fall into the river that you might have an opportunity of saving me?"

"Intended?" echoed Deveril, gazing upon the harsh repulsive features of the woman with unfeigned astonishment.

"Yes—*intended*," she said: "I mean, *by heaven*. I suppose, young man, you believe in Providence?"

"Indeed I do—most sincerely!" replied Deveril, and as he spoke, his looks sent upward a mute but eloquent thanksgiving for his deliverance.

"And I begin to do so: but I did not always," quickly rejoined the woman. "Do not interrupt me," she continued, perceiving that he was again stricken by the singularity of her looks and language: "you are too weak to talk more than is necessary. Nevertheless I wish you would answer me a few questions: but don't inquire why I put them. Your name is William Deveril: I saw it on your card just now amongst the things taken out of the pockets of your wet clothes. You are the same, then, who fought with Lord Harold Staunton? Ah, poor young man! no wonder you are weak and enfeebled. Yet weak and enfeebled as you are, you perilled your life for me. Were it for a beautiful creature of sixteen, the act would still have been noble: but for a miserable wretch such as I am, it is beyond all praise!"—and again did the singular woman gaze with a peculiar expression upon Deveril's countenance: then she muttered, to herself, "Dark hair—dark eyes—delicate aquiline features—short upper lip, with an aristocratic curl—beautiful teeth, white as pearls, and faultlessly even——"

"If," said Deveril, with a good-natured smile, "these are your questions, I really cannot hear them."

"Yes, singularly brilliant teeth," muttered the woman to herself, as that smile revealed the pearly objects of her admiration. "But to the point," she spoke aloud. "Do you know who your father was?"

"I hope so," replied Deveril, again smiling; for the question struck him as almost ludicrously singular: "and I revere his memory."

"Then he is dead? How long ago did he die?" asked the woman.

It immediately occurred to Deveril that the woman really belonged to the gipsy tribe, and that she was about to exercise the craft of her race in fortune-telling: but being naturally too good-natured to offend her, he again smiled, saying, "If you have really nothing of importance to say to me, you can well understand that I am in no state for a prolonged discourse."

"I knew you would interrupt me with these observations," remarked the woman. "In this world one dares not ask a question without stating the why and the because. But will you believe me that my objects *are* important; and therefore if you speak unnecessarily, it will be your own fault."

"Proceed then: I will humour you," said Deveril, again being struck by the manner in which the woman regarded him, as well as by the mingled sincerity and gravity with which she spoke. "Proceed."

"I asked you how long ago your father died?"

"Two years."

"And on his death-bed did he tell you nothing? did he leave no particular documents behind him?"

"Good heavens! what mean you? wherefore these questions?" cried Deveril.

"Do not excite yourself," said the woman. "You must really let me go on in my own way: but you begin to perceive that it is *not* through mere impertinent curiosity I am questioning you. However, if you feel excited now, I will meet you any where you like to-morrow."

"No—I must return to London," said Deveril; "and therefore whatever is to pass between us, let it take place now. I feel stronger than I was; and I am already interested in the discourse."

"Then have the goodness to answer my questions," rejoined the woman.

"On his death-bed my father endeavoured to say something. He was stricken with paralysis, and his speech came with the utmost difficulty. A few words however I did succeed in catching——"

"And those words?" demanded the woman, with an eagerness that contrasted strangely with her usually cold stern imperturbability of manner.

"Those words were exactly these:—'*Strolling players—manager—Thompson—could tell all.*'"

"And have you any idea of what those allusions meant?"

"I can only suppose that inasmuch as my father and mother had originally been connected with a troop of itinerant actors——"

"Is your mother alive?" demanded the woman abruptly.

"No: she died between eleven and twelve years ago."

"What are you doing in the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle?" she now asked, in that peremptory way of her's which seemed to imply that responses *must* be given to her queries.

"I cannot permit myself to be questioned any farther," said Deveril coldly.

"Yes: but I insist upon having your answers!" exclaimed the woman: then observing that a sudden flush of indignation appeared upon the invalid's countenance, she immediately added, "There! now don't be silly—I did not mean to offend you. It is the way in which I speak. Of course I do not wish to pry into your secret affairs: but if you had been to Saxondale Castle, it is somewhat important that I should know it."

"And how so?" asked Deveril.

"You must not become the questioner," replied the woman. "Do you know Lady Saxondale?"—and she fixed her eyes with so singular, so peculiar, so earnest a look upon the youth that he felt troubled as if he were being plunged into a vortex of unfathomable mysteries.

"Yes—I know her ladyship," he answered: and he felt urged on thus to answer by a power stronger than himself. "But I have not been to see her now—nor have I set foot within the walls of Saxondale Castle. Indeed, I was never there in my life."

"Never!—Ah!"—and the expression of the woman's countenance now became so exceedingly singular that Deveril started up in the couch.

"What in heaven's name," he cried, "is the meaning of all this? Why do you look at me thus? To what is this conversation to lead? For God's sake speak—explain yourself! Do you know that you are torturing me cruelly? and I deserve it not at your hands!"

"No indeed—you deserve not torture from me—for you have saved my life at the deep risk of your own:"—and the woman spoke with an impressiveness as peculiar as her looks. "Pray believe me when I say that I would not torture you willingly, nor excite you unnecessarily. Lie down—compose yourself——"

"It is impossible so long as your looks and your language continue to pile up mystery upon mystery."

"It cannot be helped: I must pursue my own course. And now tell me—if you are acquainted with Lady Saxondale, why have you not called upon her at the castle? why should you be in the neighbourhood without seeing her, and yet knowing her?"

Deveril did not immediately answer: he paused to reflect what answer he *should* give, or whether any at all. While thus deliberating, his eyes settled upon the woman's countenance; and he beheld such an air of grave decision and solemn importance imprinted there, notwithstanding the repulsive harshness of her features, that he was convinced she had really the deepest meaning in putting all these questions to him. Indeed, she was evidently not a woman who would interrogate him for mere idle curiosity's sake. In her very rags and in her ugliness—aye, even in her sinister looks, there was a certain intellectual superiority together with a vigour of purpose apparent through all. He therefore decided upon answering her queries last put.

"Business with another person brought me into this neighbourhood. Who that person is, I do not choose to name, and beg that you will not ask. I came not to see Lady Saxondale—and to speak plainly, I do not wish to see her. She has used me ill."

"In what way?" demanded the woman.

"I do not know that there is any necessity for being reserved on this point," returned Deveril, "since she has told her own tale to all her acquaintances. In a word then, I had for some months past been wont to give lessons in painting to the Hon. Misses Farefield at Saxondale House in Park Lane, London—until her ladyship made improper overtures towards me——"

"Ah!" said the woman, not loud but with a deep and almost subdued sound: and again was there something extraordinary but most unfathomable in her looks. "Proceed. You rejected these overtures, did you not—did you not?" she asked quickly.

"I did: and this was my offence against Lady Saxondale. She proved vindictive,—bitterly, bitterly vindictive—and propagated the vilest calumnies amongst her friends, to the effect that it was *I* who had made improper advances towards *her*."

"Let me look you full in the face. There! meet my eyes. Your's quail not. Yes—you are speaking truly; there is sincerity in every feature. You are as good as you are beautiful. Nevertheless, look me again full in the face, and repeat that it was not *you* that made the overtures."

"As there is a God to judge me," exclaimed Deveril, with indignant emphasis, "I did not do so It was her ladyship!"

"Enough—I believe you as firmly as if I had been a witness of the whole scene. Therefore, after that occurrence," continued the woman, "you went no more to Saxondale House?"

"I went to demand redress, but obtaining none, returned not again. Oh! now, for heaven's sake, tell me the drift of all these questions!" and Deveril spoke with anxious entreaty.

"We must go back," said the woman, not heeding his earnest words nor his pleading looks, "to earlier times. You say your parents were strolling players?"

"They were—and very poor. My mother died, as I have already told you; and then my father went to Italy, where I was brought up by him until he died also."

"And what were his circumstances in Italy?"

"Tolerably good. Indeed, he obtained a competency. But again I implore you——"

"Have you made any endeavour to find out the man Thompson to whom your father alluded in his last words?"

"I have made inquiries, and inserted advertisements—but all in vain."

"Thompson?" said the woman in a musing tone. "Most probably the manager of the strolling troop to which your father belonged—and evidently acquainted with a secret which your father meant to reveal upon his death-bed. Now, this Thompson shall be found out, if he is above ground. Though I wander all over England, wearing out my very life in the search, he shall be found. I will either discover the living man, or the grave in which he is buried!"

The woman spoke with a resolute energy and a sternness of purpose that filled Deveril with astonishment, as well as excited his curiosity to the most torturing degree of suspense. Who was this strange being that accident had thrown in his way? how was it that she had taken so sudden an interest in his affairs? why should she wander about the world in search of the man Thompson? What earthly concern could she have in the affair? All these questions did Deveril put to himself, but without the possibility of answering them by means of any conjecture of his own. Suddenly a thought struck him. Was the whole thing a stratagem on her part to obtain money from him? was she pretending this deep interest in his affairs with the hope of making a draft upon his purse? He resolved to put her to the test.

"You seem to feel an interest in me," he said; "and you speak of traversing the land to discover something that intimately concerns me? As a matter of course, you expect that I shall pay your expenses——"

"Silence, boy!" exclaimed the woman with a look of such ineffable scorn that he was at once convinced he had gone entirely on the wrong tack; and his suspicions on that head were quieted in a moment. "Do you think this is an affair of filthy lucre to me?" she asked, bending upon him a strange wild look: "or do you imagine that because I am clad thus miserably, and look a mere wandering beggar, I am affecting sympathy on your behalf for the sake of extracting the coin from your pocket? William Deveril, you utterly mistake me. Such is not my motive. But what it is, I do not intend to explain now:"—and she rose to depart.

"You cannot mean to leave me in this frightful state of suspense?" he said. "I do indeed perceive that there is a grave and a serious meaning at the bottom of all this; and you can well understand that my curiosity is painfully excited."

"I am sorry that I cannot gratify it. It would do no good now. You must restrain your feelings. Go about your avocations, whatsoever they may be, and wheresoever they may lie; and think no more of me for one whole month!"

"For one whole month!" echoed Deveril. "And then?"

"We will meet again. Carry it well in your mind;—this day month, and at this same hour too—nine o'clock in the evening—we will meet in London. See that you keep this appointment: it may, or it may not be important. If it is, so much the better: if not, there will be no harm done."

"But you have named no place where we are to meet."

"True!" said the woman: and then she appeared to reflect for upwards of a minute. "Tell me the place of your abode," she suddenly exclaimed.

Deveril at once named the villa in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park.

"Good!" said the woman. "One month hence, day for day and hour for hour, will I be at your dwelling. And now farewell."

Having thus spoken, the strange creature abruptly took her departure; and in a few moments Deveril heard the cottage door close behind her.

We will not make any farther attempt to analyze the conflicting emotions which this scene left in the mind of our young hero: they can be better imagined than described. Exhausted in every sense, he soon fell asleep through very weariness; and opened not his eyes again until the morning. He rose, considerably refreshed and invigorated by the uninterrupted slumber which he had enjoyed; and having dressed himself, he liberally rewarded the good-hearted peasants for all the kind attentions he had received at their hands. He then walked across to Gainsborough, whence he repaired to London by the earliest and readiest means that presented themselves.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE SIGN OF THE "BILLY-GOAT."

It was between nine and ten o'clock at night, when William Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe alighted from a private carriage in the immediate vicinity of old St. Pancras Church; and as they had previously rendered themselves acquainted with the position of Agar Town, by consulting the map of London, they had little trouble in making out its actual site. They crossed the canal bridge, and inquiring of a person whom they met which was the sign of the *Billy Goat*, were duly directed thither. On reaching the low boozing-ken, such uproarious sounds of uncouth merriment, mingled with horrible imprecations, came forth, that Deveril caught Mr. Gunthorpe by the arm, saying, "My dear sir, I think you had much better not venture into this horrible place."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is much worse for a young man like you—almost a boy, I might say—to penetrate into such a den. But it is necessary—and we will go together. Come—follow me."

Thus speaking, Mr. Gunthorpe pushed open the folding-doors of the public-house, and walked in, Deveril close at his heels.

"Tell them wagabones in the parlour there," exclaimed Solomon Patch, "not to make such a cussed row. Here's genelmen come in: and who knows but they have a mind to take a bottle of wine in a quiet comfortable manner?"

But as he spoke, the landlord of the *Billy Goat* eyed the visitors suspiciously, as if he thought they

might be the Commissioners of Police themselves, or a couple of functionaries from the Home Office, or any other officials invested with high authority.

"And tell them vimen," yelled out Mrs. Patch, "to leave off screaming and skreeking in sich a hawful manner."

The injunctions of the landlord and landlady were issued to the dirty-looking pot-boy, who accordingly shuffled into the parlour, and with a knowing wink and a jerk of the thumb over the shoulder, said, "You had better be quiet here, cos why there's a couple of nobs jist looked in."

"Then they'll stand treat," cried one of the women: and immediately afterwards a half-intoxicated creature, with a brazen look and her dress in the most immodest disorder, presented herself right in front of Mr. Gunthorpe, crying, "You'll stand a crown bowl, won't yer? I knows you vill. I can see you are von of the right sort by your vicked old eye."

Mr. Gunthorpe's first impression was to utter a rebuke to the woman: but perceiving the state she was in, and having moreover no inclination to get into a controversy, he threw down half-a-sovereign, saying to the landlord, "I understand what is required of me: so you can send in liquor to this amount."

Hereupon there was a burst of applause from the half-intoxicated woman and some dozen of shocking-looking ruffians who had crowded out from the parlour to see what was taking place; and when the uproar had subsided, numerous complimentary remarks were made in respect to Mr. Gunthorpe.

"I told yer he was a brick," said the woman who had elicited the donation.

"A regular trump," exclaimed Spider Bill, who was one of the party.

"A full-blown tulip, and no mistake," added Mat the Cadger.

"Von of the stumpy sort," observed Tony Wilkins—thereby meaning that Mr. Gunthorpe came down with his money handsomely.

"I on'y hope he's as rich as he's stout for his own sake," cried one of the women: and then there was a general laugh.

"Now do go in and keep yerselves *to* yerselves," exclaimed Solomon Patch: "or else not a mag's worth of lush shall ye see till you do:"—and then as soon as this threat had proved effectual, the landlord went on to say, addressing himself to the visitors with the most grovelling, fawning, obsequiousness, "You see, genelmen, I do my best to keep the place 'spectable; and last time I received the compliments of the cheerman at the Sessions House when I went for my license. Says he in a werry perlite manner, 'Mr. Patch,' says he, 'I have had a eye on your house for a many years; and I never knowed one so well-conducted in all London. It does you honour, Mr. Patch; and if knighthoods was given publicans, the Prime Minister should recommend you to the Queen for that honour.'—Now ealy, genelmen, I am not proud, but that's what the cheerman did say."

"And I have no doubt you made a suitable acknowledgment," said Mr. Gunthorpe drily. "But come, can we have a bottle of wine in a private room?"

"To be sure, genelmen: you shall have the bar-parlour. Now, missus, clear away your needlework traps there, and make the cat get off the table. Walk round this way, genelmen. You can be all by yourselves here as comfortable as possible; and as for the wine, you will say you never tasted sich in all your life."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Your name is Solomon Patch, I presume? You have already told us that it is Patch: but we want to speak to the person who has got the prefix of Solomon."

"It's me, genelmen: that's my own wirtuous name for want of a better. But it's scriptural, genelmen—and that sanctifies a feller."

Mr. Gunthorpe looked as if he thought that for a person who was sanctified there never was such an ill-looking rascal in all the world. He however said nothing, but took his seat at the table in the bar-parlour, into which by this time he had proceeded, followed by Deveril. Mrs. Patch, having cleared away from the table her work-box and the worsted stockings she was darning, returned into the bar to serve the customers; while Solomon Patch, having shut the door of communication between the aforesaid bar and the parlour behind, drew the cork of a bottle of wine, produced three glasses, and then obsequiously filled two of them.

"Help yourself and sit down," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "We wish to have a little private conversation with you; and I may as well tell you at once that we have no hostile intent. We mean nothing of the sort: but we think you can serve us—and if so, you shall be rewarded."

At this announcement Mr. Solomon Patch's manner became more obsequious than ever; and he likewise assumed an air of mysterious confidence as he drew his chair closer to that in which Mr. Gunthorpe was seated. This gentleman, producing his purse, drew forth two or three bank-notes and laid them upon the table—an operation which the rapacious landlord watched with considerable satisfaction.

"Now," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe, "I am going to ask you two or three questions; and by the frankness of your replies will the amount of your reward be measured. In the first place, have you any correspondence with a lady of high rank, and who at this present moment is in the country?"

"A lady of high rank?" repeated Solomon, wondering whether his interlocutor could possibly mean Lady Bess: but almost at the same instant the thought struck him that the visit of the two gentlemen might be for the purpose of entrapping the female highwayman—a proceeding to which Solomon was by no means disposed to lend himself.

"Yes—a lady of high rank," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "and to be more explicit, I may state that she has a house in London and a country-seat in Lincolnshire."

"Then I have no sich a correspondent, sir," replied Solomon.

"But wherefore did you hesitate ere you answered?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe, eyeing the man closely.

"Because, sir, I'm a cautious and wary kind of a bird, saving your presence; and I'm not in the habit of giving information in a hurry."

"Perhaps, then, you may not know who your correspondent really is," resumed the old gentleman; "and yet you may have such a correspondent

Now, in plain terms did you not receive a letter the day before yesterday, posted at Gainsborough, and addressed to you in just these words—*Mr. Solomon Patch, the Billy Goat, Agar Town, St. Pancras, London?*"

"Well, I did have such a letter," answered the landlord.

"And now, to come to the point at once, will you show me that letter if I give you fifty pounds?"

The old man hesitated for nearly a minute; and then he said, "Before we go any farther, sir, I think I ought to know who you and this young gentleman be——"

"Very well: you shall have that information. Here is my card. William, produce your's."

Deveril did as he was desired; and Solomon, having looked at them both, fixed his eyes on our hero, observing, "Ah, sir—I have seen your name in the newspaper about some duel-business. I hope you've got over your wound?"

"You see that I am not suffering very much from it at present," replied Deveril. "And now that you know who we are, I think that you need not hesitate to comply with our wishes."

"I don't mind showing you what I received from Gainsborough two or three days ago," observed Patch: "if so be you promises as how that you won't break open t'other thing what's inside."

"Very good. Here are the fifty pounds," said Mr. Gunthorpe; "and you may produce your letter."

Solomon Patch drew forth an old greasy pocket-book; and from the midst of some papers he produced a letter, which Deveril at once recognised, by the blotch of ink as well as by the handwriting, to be the one he had seen at the post-office at Gainsborough.

"Give me over the money with one hand," said Patch, "and take the letter with t'other. There's nothing like doing things all square and proper."

"Do you think I should cheat you out of your promised reward?" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, somewhat indignantly. "Here is the money: give me the letter."

The exchange was made; and notwithstanding his servile obsequiousness, Solomon Patch could not avoid showing a low cunning leer of satisfaction upon his countenance as he consigned the bank-notes to his greasy pocket-book.

But Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril did not notice the expression of the man's villanous countenance: for the former was opening the envelope, and the latter was regarding him. That envelope was a blank; but it contained a note marked *Private*, and addressed to *Mr. Chiffin*. Gunthorpe and Deveril at once exchanged looks to imply that they had been taken in; and that though fifty pounds were already gone, they were not a whit wiser than they were before.

"I respect the pledge I gave," said the old gentleman, replacing the note in the envelope; "and I will not open this enclosure without your consent. Now, will you take another fifty pounds for allowing me to do so?"

"It can't be done, sir," responded Solomon Patch. "You see that note is directed to another party; and if I hav'n't had the curiosity to open it myself, I can't suffer you—not by no means whatsomever."

"Who is this Mr. Chiffin?" inquired Gunthorpe.

"Well, sir, he's a genelman which frequents this house, and is a wery good customer of mine. But to tell you the truth, he would prove rather a orkard kind of customer if I was to break open his letters. He hasn't been here for a week or ten days past; and I don't know what's become of him."

At this moment Mrs. Patch opened the door of the bar-parlour, and whispered something in her husband's ear,—having done which, she disappeared again, closing the door behind her.

"Now this is fortunate," observed Solomon. "Mr. Chiffin, the wery highly respectable genelman which this note is addressed to, has just gone into the tap-room. If you like to negotiate with him, I'll introduce him."

"By all means," replied Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Just let me put this letter back again into my pocket-book," said Patch; "and you needn't say a word about the little matter of fifty pounds—'cos why, Mr. Chiffin's rather an eccentric character, and he might take it into his head to cry halves."

"Never fear," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Go and bring the person in."

"Oh, you will find him a wery nice agreeable genelman, and easy to do business with, when there's money in the matter."

Having thus spoken in exalted eulogy of his friend, Solomon Patch issued from the bar-parlour; and as the door closed behind him, Mr. Gunthorpe said to Deveril, "Depend upon it we shall succeed yet. Gold will do anything with such characters as these. But I confess I am rather curious to see this Mr. Chiffin who is in correspondence with the brilliant and splendid Lady Saxondale:"—and the old gentleman uttered these last words with a sneer.

In a few minutes Solomon Patch returned to the bar-parlour, introducing Chiffin the Cannibal. The ruffian was clad in his usual style, with the great shaggy coat—his rough trousers turned up so as to form a hem and leave his heavy boots fully exposed; while his battered white hat, with the rusty black crape, surmounted the most hang-dog countenance that either Mr. Gunthorpe or William Deveril had ever seen in their lives. Chiffin had not shaved for three days; and the growth of his black bristly beard was no improvement to a face the villanous grimness of which was enough to frighten any nervous person. He had his club under his arm; and the looks which he threw upon Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril on entering the bar-parlour, were rapid, searching, and suspicious. Mr. Gunthorpe was certainly not prepared to behold such an awful-looking character; and he stared at him in mingled consternation and curiosity; while Deveril shuddered at the suspicion which he entertained from the circumstance of such a ferocious wretch being in correspondence with Lady Saxondale.

"This is Mr. Chiffin," said Solomon Patch, closing the door very carefully.

"At your service, gentleman," observed the Cannibal, in his gruff deep voice; but he tried to look as amiable as he could at the moment.

"Sit down, Mr. Chiffin," said the old gentleman, whose object it of course was to be as courteous as he could possibly render himself towards such a bloodthirsty-looking miscreant. "And now help yourself to a glass of wine: for we have a little business to discuss. I suppose the landlord here has told you who we are?"

WILLIAM DEVERIL.

"Yes—and something about a letter," said Chiffin, accepting the two invitations relative to the seat and the wine. "Where is that letter, Sol?"

"Here it is:"—and the landlord produced it from his pocket-book.

Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril watched the fellow's countenance as he opened the note enclosed in the envelope: but its contents were evidently brief enough—for at a glance he scanned them, and then said shortly, "Oh! that's it—eh?" at the same time consigning the note to his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Chiffin," said Gunthorpe, "I will come to the point at once. My young friend here happened to be in the post-office at Gainsborough when that letter was posted; and knowing by whose hand it was thus posted, he for certain reasons became anxious to learn what its contents could be—an anxiety wherein I fully share. Will you accept fifty pounds and let us see that note?"

"Make it a hundred," said Chiffin; "and it shall be in your hand in less than a minute."

"Very well: be it a hundred. Here are two fifty pound notes: but as everything ought to be square," added Gunthorpe, glancing slyly towards Solomon Patch, "you shall take the money with one hand and give me the little billet with the other."

"Ah! I see you get up early enough in the morning," said Chiffin with a chuckle, "and can't be took in easy. Here's the note."

The exchange was made; and Mr. Gunthorpe opened the billet, Deveril looking over his shoulder. All that it contained were these words:—

"Come down into Lincolnshire in the course of a few days I wish to see you particularly. Every night at eleven o'clock I will look into the chapel to see if you are there."

Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril exchanged looks as much as to ask each other what was to be done now? for they were scarcely any wiser than before, beyond having their suspicion confirmed that Lady Saxondale required the aid of some desperate character, no doubt for desperate purpose.

"You expect to be well rewarded for whatsoever this may lead to?" said Mr. Gunthorpe after a brief pause, and addressing himself to Chiffin.

"I never tell no tales," responded the Cannibal, "unless it's made worth my while."

"Whatever this lady may offer you as a reward for the business in which she requires you," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "I will give you double if you put us in the way of learning what it is."

"That's speaking plain enough," observed Chiffin; "and I like the proposition so well that it's a bargain. What do you want me to do?"

"From this note, brief though it be, it is evident that you have the means of introducing yourself at will into some chapel——"

"That of Saxondale Castle," interjected Deveril. "The allusion is clearly thereto."

"Yes: all right," said Chiffin. "Go on."

"Well then," continued Mr. Gunthorpe, "if you can introduce yourself into the castle, you can no doubt introduce others; and therefore you must render me and Mr. Deveril ear-witnesses of whatsoever takes place between yourself and Lady Saxondale. If you do this, I promise you precisely the double of whatsoever reward she may offer you."

"And of course I can take both rewards?" observed Chiffin inquiringly.

"If she pays you beforehand, you can take your reward from her, or not—as you choose. With that we have nothing to do: but although you will faithfully promise at the time to perform whatsoever her ladyship requires, you must leave yourself in our hands."

"And there is to be no such thing as constables, or exposure, or kicking up a row, or anything of that sort?" said Chiffin: "because it would be rather inconvenient for me to get myself into any trouble."

"We shall be quite contented with learning what Lady Saxondale's designs are—and frustrating them if need be," responded Mr. Gunthorpe; "and we do not want to give unnecessary publicity to anything."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," observed the Cannibal. "I shall set off into Lincolnshire to-morrow; and I will meet you the day after to-morrow, at any hour or place you like, in the evening."

"Let it be at half-past nine o'clock, and somewhere in the neighbourhood of Saxondale Castle," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"On the bank of the river, and on the north side of the castle, about a mile or two distant from the building. I shall be punctual."

"And so shall we," replied Mr. Gunthorpe, rising from his seat.

He then tossed down a guinea for the benefit of Solomon Patch, who was infinitely delighted that the old gentleman did not allude to the fifty pounds which had been so trickily obtained from him. Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril then issued forth from the boozing-ken, well satisfied to breathe the fresh air once more: for the very atmosphere of that place appeared laden with the pestiferous breath of crime, debauchery, and demoralization.

"What think you now, my dear sir?" asked William Deveril, as he and Mr. Gunthorpe pursued their way towards the spot where they had left the carriage waiting.

"I can form no other conjecture than that which has already struck us both—that her ladyship, finding the affair in respect to yourself, becoming serious, is resolved to make away with you. But we shall put her to confusion."

"Oh, what a dreadful woman!" exclaimed William, shuddering at the thought. "Yes—my dear sir, it is indeed difficult to arrive at any other conclusion: for this circumstance, following so closely upon the receipt of the letter from her solicitors, is but too well calculated to confirm that belief. Are you not shocked, Mr. Gunthorpe, at the bare idea of a lady of such a proud position, condescending to make use of such instruments as that villain whose company we have just left?"

"Shocked, certainly—but not at all astonished," returned Mr. Gunthorpe, in his own dry blunt manner. "It is all very well for the higher classes to denounce the wickedness and the demoralization of the lower: but in a thousand ways it is the example of the former which creates the crime and vice of the latter. Besides, William, you were not so long in Italy without learning that titled ladies make use of bravoes who do the work of murder for gold: and why should it not be so in this country? Depend upon it, there are more crimes committed by the upper classes, or else at their instigation,

than the world is generally inclined to believe. Candidly and frankly speaking, I do not think that upon the face of this earth there is a class more depraved and unscrupulous than the patrician order in England. When I was a young man, and before I went to Italy, I had opportunities of judging of all these things. I belonged to three or four clubs—the first-rate and most fashionable ones—yes, and what is more, calling themselves perfectly exclusive. Why, would you believe that half the members of every one of those clubs consisted of mere blacklegs and swindlers, although passing in the world as gentlemen? At this present moment there are at the West End thousands and thousands of scoundrels calling themselves gentlemen, who dress well—some keeping their horses—some driving their cabs—some having livery-servants—and many living at first-rate hotels: but not one of the whole lot has got an ostensible income. Very often, when they get up in the morning, they do not know how they are going to pay for their dinner, and are compelled to have recourse to frauds and swindlings to replenish their purses. These *gentlemen*, as they call themselves, would be fearfully indignant if placed under the *surveillance* of the police; and yet they are only a fashionable kind of swell-mob after all. Ah! you perceive, William, that I know a little of London life, although I have been absent from my native country for so many, many years."

By this time the carriage was reached. It was a plain brougham, with no other servant besides the coachman: but it was a private equipage, and belonged to Mr. Gunthorpe. On entering the carriage the orders were to drive to Mr. Deveril's residence near the Regent's Park.

"Yes," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe, as he and his young friend were seated together inside the vehicle, which now moved rapidly away—"those who are well acquainted with what is termed fashionable life, will, if they have any respect for themselves, flee from it as from a morass swarming with reptiles—or I should rather say, from a beautiful garden where all is pleasant and agreeable to the eye, but where every flower has its subtle poison and every plant conceals a venomous snake beneath the shade of its foliage. There are of course some bright and remarkable exceptions: there are a few pure lilies and some sweetly blushing roses in that garden, in whose flowers there lurks no venom. Such, for instance, is Florina Staunton."

"Thank you, my dear sir, for making this exception!" said Deveril, in low but enthusiastic terms.

"To be sure! Why should I not? It is the truth. That girl," continued the old gentleman, "is an angel of purity and goodness. I know she is: I read it in her looks the very first moment I met her in the Opera-box. Now I know, William Deveril, that I am a somewhat comical-looking person, and that my appearance is such as to provoke a smile on the part of the silly young creatures and impertinent young coxcombs of fashionable life. But Florina immediately treated me with kindness and respect. She did this out of regard for her uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, by whom I was recommended—and also from the natural excellence of her own heart. She has not been spoilt by the frivolities of the sphere in which she moves; and we will take care that she shall not be, William Deveril," added the old gentleman emphatically.

"I presume, sir, you are in correspondence with the Marquis of Eagledean?"

"You rogue, you!" exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe, laughing; "do you want to ferret out my secrets? Well, but you shan't, though. Leave everything in my hands: I know very well what I am about—and whatever I promise you, depend upon it I can perform. Have I not told you that Florina shall never marry that contemptible young jackanapes Edmund Saxondale?"

"You have, sir: and you have spoken so confidently——"

"Confidently?" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "It is enough to make one speak confidently—and emphatically too—when one contemplates the bare idea of such a sweet creature as Florina being sacrificed to such a miserable abortion as that Saxondale. But now, I dare say you are longing that I should repeat the assurance I have before given you—that inasmuch as Florina shall not marry Edmund Saxondale, a certain young friend of mine whom I will not more particularly mention, has everything to hope in that quarter."

"Ah! my dear sir, I cannot mistake your allusion," exclaimed Deveril, taking his kind friend's hand and pressing it with grateful warmth. "You know not how happy you render me!"

"Happy!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Of course I want to make you happy. You are a very good young man; I love you as much as if you were my own son—and that is more than I ever told you yet. As for your sister Angela, this must be her last season upon the stage——"

"What do you mean, my dear sir?" cried William, in mingled suspense and joy.

"I mean exactly what I say. Although I have the sublimest confidence in Angela's purity and virtue, yet it is impossible to leave her longer than can be helped in the atmosphere of a theatre. She must fulfil her present contract with the manager, as a matter of course: but afterwards she shall dance no more in public. You are astonished at what I am saying? Leave it to me to do what I think fit; and in the meantime don't say a word to Angela. Why, you rogue, when I first knew you at Florence, I was more than half inclined to put you in a position that should enable Angela to keep off the stage: but I didn't know you quite well enough then—and so I thought I would wait awhile till I knew you both better. You don't think that I should be taking all this trouble in different ways on your account, unless I had something like a friendship for you?"

"I am sure, my dear sir," answered Deveril, profoundly moved, "I shall never be able to testify my gratitude——"

"Gratitude!—don't talk to me of gratitude! Have you not always been kind, and respectful, and attentive to me——except, by the bye, when you suffered me to be lugged off before your eyes and tied to a gate But I don't blame you, William—you could not do otherwise; and besides, I respected you all the more for it afterwards. You showed yourself a brave young man upon the occasion. But about Angela—I suppose you will not be displeased that she should quit the stage?"

"Displeased? Oh! it is my sincerest aspiration!" exclaimed Deveril; "and at one time, when I was succeeding so well with my own avocations previous

to the propagation of Lady Saxondale's calumny, I resolved that my sister should not form another engagement at the expiration of her present one. With the two thousand guineas which she will have received by the time it is over, and with my own resources——"

"You thought you could live very comfortably indeed?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Well, we shall see. Perhaps I may be inclined to add a little to your store: for of course you will not refuse to allow me to do exactly what I choose. I have not forgotten, William Deveril, that when I first knew you at Florence you declined the remuneration I offered for completing Signor Vivaldi's picture; and to speak candidly, it was that circumstance which first gave me such a high opinion of you. Depend upon it, the money is bearing good interest for you, in my pocket."

"My dear Mr. Gunthorpe," replied Deveril, both affected and astonished,—for his worthy friend had never spoken before with so much frankness as to the liberality of his ulterior intentions,—"I do not know——I am at a loss to conceive——how I have deserved so much goodness at your hands. But I hope you will not fancy that I ever entertained any selfish views when proffering you such little attentions as it was in my power to show?"

"Selfish views?—ridiculous!" ejaculated the old gentleman. "I am not so blind to the true characters of men. But here we are:"—and as he spoke, the carriage stopped in front of Deveril's picturesque little villa.

"You will come in and sup with us?" said our young hero.

"No—not to-night: it is too late. Good bye, my dear boy—good bye:"—and Mr. Gunthorpe shook Deveril warmly by the hand as the latter alighted from the vehicle. "To-morrow morning I shall come to you early, to make our arrangements about leaving for Lincolnshire. Once more good night."

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE DANCER AND THE TWO LORDS.

At the same time that the preceding scene was taking place, the following one was occurring elsewhere.

The elegant drawing-room of Evergreen Villa in the Seven Sisters' Road was lighted by the superb lustre suspended from the ceiling; and the beautiful Emily Archer was seated upon the sofa, with Lord Harold Staunton by her side. He had only been announced a few minutes; and as yet the conversation had merely touched upon those ordinary fleeting topics which are too trivial to be recorded here. Harold had however learnt that Lord Saxondale might be very shortly expected; and therefore he was anxious to make the most of whatsoever interval remained for him to be alone with Emily.

"Now, my dear girl," he said, "I wish to speak to you very seriously——"

"What! are you going to make me an offer of marriage?" exclaimed Miss Archer, laughing so as to display her brilliant teeth.

"Perhaps I might do a worse thing than that," replied Harold, in order to flatter her. "But as you say that Saxondale will soon return, do not let us waste time: for I really have important things to talk to you about. In the first place, Emily, do you remember all that affair I told you of concerning Lady Saxondale?"

"What! and the masquerade dress, and so forth?" exclaimed Emily. "To be sure, I do. Edmund and I often talk of it, and have a good laugh over it into the bargain. By the bye, Edmund seems to love his mother amazingly—does he not?"

"You of course mean the very reverse. But tell me, Emily—have you repeated those circumstances to anybody else? Have you gossipped concerning them amongst your friends and companions at the Opera? Do speak frankly and truly: for I am most anxious to know."

"No—I have not—upon my honour I have not," replied Emily. "I do not pretend to be of a very serious or prudent nature: but those were circumstances which, coming to my knowledge in the way they did, I kept to myself."

"You are sure of this? you are certain that you have not inadvertently let drop a word to a soul?" said Harold, with evident eagerness.

"I repeat—and more solemnly still if you wish it—that I have not. I am sure that I have not," added the *dansense*, emphatically. "But tell me—have you made it up with Lady Saxondale?—for Edmund informed me that you had gone suddenly off upon a visit to the Castle in Lincolnshire."

"Yes:—I have made it up with her—and all things considered, I should be sorry to do her an injury," observed Staunton.

"Then I presume——"

"Presume what you will, my dear girl," interrupted Harold; "but do not waste time in unnecessary remarks. Where is that Spanish dress? You have got it here—I wish you would give it to me."

"Ah!" ejaculated Emily, as a sudden thought struck her: and then she muttered to herself, "To be sure! I have been a fool, with a knowledge of such a secret as this——"

"What are you saying to yourself?" demanded Harold, some slight misgiving springing up in his mind.

"I was thinking," responded Miss Archer, "that I would rather not part with the dress for the moment:"—and there was altogether a change in her manner and her looks, from a mixture of languor and levity, to a mien of seriousness blended with resolute decision.

"Emily, I do not understand you!" ejaculated Harold. "You cannot refuse to do me such a trifling favour? Consider on what terms we have been—how friendly—how intimate——"

"Yes: but I must look out for my own interests," responded Miss Archer. "You have made it up with Lady Saxondale; and you have your own purpose to serve in screening her reputation. It never struck me until just now that by the possession of this secret I may serve my own purposes likewise."

"To be sure!" said the young nobleman. "I did not for a moment think that you would give up the dress without some little consideration. Will you allow me to present you with five hundred guineas?"

"Ah!" again muttered Emily to herself: "the thing is indeed serious in their eyes—very serious, evidently."

"Do tell me what you are saying in this undertone—I cannot hear you. Speak out, Emily. Are not you and I old friends? Come, Saxondale will be returning—and do let us settle this little business at once. Fetch me down the dress, there's a dear girl; and here is the little gift which I have taken the liberty to offer you."

"I thank you, my dear Lord Harold," responded the ballet-dancer, with mock affability, and affecting to bow very courteously: "but I think that the secret I possess, and the truth of which is corroborated by the masquerade-garb, is worth a little more than five hundred guineas."

"Nonsense, Emily! What does it prove, after all?"

"It proves this," returned the *danseuse*: "that there is a certain story come to my knowledge, in which the heroine is a lady who wore a particular dress at a particular ball. Now, suppose inquiries are instituted amongst the West End milliners—can it not be ascertained who made this dress? and can it not be proved that it was made for Lady Saxondale? Thus, even if her son should refuse to corroborate my averment that he found the dress in a box belonging to his mother, the ownership of that dress can be brought home all the same to her ladyship."

"But is it possible, Emily, that your views have taken a mercenary turn?" cried the young nobleman.

"By what right, Lord Harold Staunton," exclaimed Miss Archer, her spirit flaming up, "do you address me in such terms as these? Doubtless *you* have your own selfish interests in wishing to hush up an affair to which at the time you would have scarcely hesitated to give the fullest publicity. Well, then, that secret is worth a fortune to *me*:"—and she looked him full in the face, her large dark eyes expressing the firmest decision.

"Name the sum that you require," said Lord Harold, with difficulty concealing the bitter vexation and spite that he experienced at the turn the affair had taken; and he inwardly cursed his own folly for having given it such an air of importance in the first instance.

"After all that has just taken place between us," replied Emily, in a cold voice, "I do not choose to negotiate with your lordship."—and as she thus spoke she rose from her seat, as much as to imply that he could take his departure if he chose.

"Come, Emily—do not let us fall out upon the subject," said Staunton. "I did not mean to give utterance to anything offensive—very far from it—I would not do such a thing. Do let us be friends again. Give me your hand, Emily."

"No, my lord: everything is at an end between you and me. You have spoken insultingly to me—and I resent it. As for the secret which is in my possession, I shall know how to negotiate at headquarters."

"You mean that you will write to Lady Saxondale?" said Lord Harold, visibly perplexed.

"I shall not write to her ladyship: I shall go to her," was the firm response.

"But you will offend Edmund—you will break with him altogether——"

"What care I?" ejaculated the *danseuse*, disdainfully. "I am already more than disgusted with him—I hate him. Nor do I mind telling you frankly and candidly that the sooner I can rid myself altogether of him, the better. What I shall get from Lady Saxondale for keeping her secret, will be more gained in a day than I should get out of Edmund for a year."

"Ah!" ejaculated Harold: "then your views indeed soar high?"

"They are proportionate to the importance of the secret for the knowledge of which I am indebted to *you*:"—and Miss Archer gave an ironical laugh. "Yes," she added, still in the same vein; "and my obligation is still greater to your lordship: for you have taught me the importance of that secret which I had all along regarded as being of no more value than any other piece of gossip or scandal."

"Now, Emily, once for all listen to me," said Harold, feeling that his position was an awkward one. "I have the command of some little money at present; and if you will state your terms, I shall perhaps be enabled to meet them—which will save you a journey into Lincolnshire, besides the unpleasantness of such a negotiation personally conducted."

"You must indeed be very rich all of a sudden, my lord," responded Emily, "if you can meet my terms, as you phrase it. Perhaps you have five thousand pounds at your banker's?"

"Am I to understand, Miss Archer," asked Lord Harold, almost aghast, "that you entertain such an exorbitant notion?"

"Why all this trifling? wherefore exchange so many words?" cried the *danseuse*. "Have I not given you to understand, as pointedly though as politely as I could, that I wished to be alone? But if you require a positive answer from me, I will tell you at once that my terms are five thousand pounds."

"In three days you shall have the money, Emily," answered Harold. "Will you give me up the dress at once, if I present you with a thousand guineas now, and my note of hand payable at three days' sight for the remainder?"

"No—assuredly not," responded Emily: then with a look of malicious mockery, she said, "Ah! my lord, I have over-reached you. I have made you avow that the secret is worth five thousand guineas; but I mean to have ten. Lady Saxondale will not hesitate to silence my lips with that amount. And now, my lord, I wish you good evening."

As the *danseuse* thus spoke, she rang the bell; and Lord Harold, perceiving how useless it was to remain arguing the point, and into what monstrous blunders he had fallen from first to last, bowed distantly and withdrew.

He had his cabriolet waiting for him in front of the house; and he was about to enter it, when he bethought himself of a plan which at the very first glance seemed feasible. In less than a minute did he revolve it in his mind: and the result was a determination to carry it out. He ordered his servant to drive away with the cabriolet, and wait for him at the bottom of the road; and when the vehicle had departed, Lord Harold posted himself at a little distance from the garden-gate of Evergreen Villa—so that he could watch the premises without being observed by any one who should arrive there. He had not been in his place of concealment many

minutes, when a hired cab drove up to the gate; and in the clear star-light Lord Harold recognized Edmund Saxondale in the individual who alighted. He waited till he saw him enter the villa, and then, opening the garden-gate as noiselessly as possible, he stole round to the back part of the house. Through the kitchen-window he perceived the cook, the housemaid, and the *soubrette*, seated together at supper,—the groom and coachman not living in the house. Now, from certain antecedent circumstances, it was well known to these domestics that Lord Harold had been on very intimate terms with Miss Emily Archer: and they therefore were not particularly surprised when they saw him enter the kitchen and place his finger to his lip, as much as to imply that they were to be silent. Then, beckoning the *soubrette* out into the back garden, he thrust a few guineas into her hand, saying, "You must manage to get me stealthily up-stairs to your mistress's chamber."

"But his lordship is here," responded the young lady's-maid, though not refusing to take the money.

"I know it, my dear girl," replied Harold, tapping her upon the cheek. "I met him just now in the road, and he told me that he was only going to stay half-an-hour. You know very well it is all right. So do not hesitate."

"Oh, I am sure that I have no objection, my lord!" rejoined the *soubrette*: "and one thing is very certain—that missus likes you infinitely better than Lord Saxondale. She has told me so a hundred times over."

"Of course—I know it well. And now do not delay; but contrive to introduce me as stealthily as you can," urged the nobleman.

"Come then," said the *soubrette*, who delighted in being the confidante of an intrigue. "You will have to pass through the kitchen, you know."

"Never fear. The other servants will not tell his lordship," added Staunton, affecting to laugh merrily, as if it were a capital joke. "Besides, I shall put a golden seal upon each of their lips as I pass through."

"Ah! you put seals on lips, my lord?" said the *soubrette*, surveying him archly.

"Yes—like this," he replied, throwing his arm round her waist and kissing her.

"O fie, my lord—I did not mean that," said the girl; yet it was precisely what she did mean, and what she sought: then, as she arranged her coquettish cap, she added, "Come quickly, since so it is to be."

She now led the way back again into the kitchen, where Harold threw a sovereign into the lap of the housemaid and another into that of the cook, both of whom were highly delighted at this proof of his generosity. The *soubrette* conducted him cautiously up the stairs; and as they passed the drawing-room door on the first landing, it struck them both that high words were being exchanged between Edmund Saxondale and Miss Archer. In consequence of this altercation there was all the less chance of his footsteps being overheard; and he was safely escorted by the *soubrette* to the exquisitely furnished chamber of the *danseuse*. There the wax-candles were lighted; and Harold, seating himself on an ottoman at the foot of the bed, said in a whispering voice, "I can make myself comfortable here for the present."

The *soubrette* threw upon him a wicked look, and issued from the room. The moment Harold was alone, he commenced a search in all Miss Archer's boxes, drawers, and cupboards, for the masquerade-dress,—treading however upon tiptoe as lightly as he could, and conducting his proceedings as noiselessly as possible.

Meanwhile what was taking place in the drawing-room? The reader is well aware that Edmund Saxondale possessed a very bad temper—one of those tempers, indeed, that may be described as of a nasty spiteful kind; and if ever he had anything to annoy him, he was accustomed to vent his wrath upon the first person that he thought he might make his victim in this respect. Now, he had been dining with three or four dissipated young men at an hotel at the West End; and happening to have a few words of dispute with one of them, he had been insulted in a manner which were he possessed of proper spirit, he would have resented signally. But not having the courage to risk a duel, he had quitted the company in a pet—had thrown himself into a cab—and in an execrable temper, had reached Evergreen Villa.

On entering the drawing-room where Emily was seated, he at once said, "Well, I do think you might show a little more pleasure at seeing me."

"What do you mean?" demanded the *danseuse*, who, having made up her mind to break with Lord Saxondale, was neither in a mood to put up with his ill-humour, nor yet altogether displeased at finding a motive ready made for quarrelling. "Do you suppose that I am going to rush from the sofa and throw myself into your arms?"

"At all events, you needn't treat me so cool as you do. What the deuce do I have a mistress for, unless it is to make herself agreeable?"

"And pray what do I honour you with my favour for, unless it is that you are to make yourself agreeable to me?"

"Why, you ungrateful minx, you!" ejaculated Saxondale: "I have done everything for you. What did you possess when I took you from that beggarly Mr. Walter? how much were your jewels worth? how was your house furnished? what sort of an equipage had you? how much money did he allow you?"

"You mean paltry fellow," cried Emily, her handsome countenance flushing with an anger that was utterly unfeigned; "how dare you reproach me with those gifts which I so richly deserve? Why, there are plenty of young men who would be rejoiced to ruin themselves for such as I am. An actress or a *danseuse* has not established her fame till she has sent half-a-dozen lovers into the Bench or through the Insolvents' Court."

"Well, I can tell you very candidly, I don't mean to ruin myself for you—and so that's all about it. How do I know that you are faithful to me? How do I know, I say?"—and Lord Saxondale looked spitefully at his mistress: for what he had just thrown out as a taunt, rebounded back to his mind with all the violence of a suspicion.

"I am sure," responded Emily Archer, contemptuously, "I am not going to offer you any proof of my fidelity, even if I could."

"Because you know that you can't," retorted Edmund. "Hah!" he suddenly ejaculated: and stooping down, he picked up a gentleman's kid

glove from the carpet. "This is not your's, at all events; and I don't think you can advance it as one of your proofs of fidelity?"

"To be sure not," replied Emily, with the calmest indifference. "That glove belongs to a better man than you are——although," she murmured in an undertone, "I *have* quarrelled with him."

"What's that you are saying?" ejaculated Saxondale, livid with rage. "Who has been to see you while I was out? You promised to remain altogether alone this evening, as you were not going to the Opera——"

"But it appears that I have had a visitor,' retorted Emily, with a malicious smile.

"And who was your visitor?" demanded Edmund, trembling with rage.

"I owe no account of my actions to you," was the response, disdainfully given.

"Yes—but you do, though," ejaculated Saxondale: "for if I thought you had deceived me and were making a fool of me, you may depend upon it I would not take the thing very easily. But I see how it is—you want to pick a quarrel with me, to drive me out of the house. Perhaps you have got the owner of this glove concealed somewhere? or you are in hopes he will come back to reclaim it? By Jove!" he suddenly exclaimed, "I have a very great mind to search the whole place from top to bottom."

"Do so," said Emily, contemptuously. "But observe, if you find no one, I shall take your suspicions as an outrage leaving no alternative but to break off everything between us."

"You are trying to prevent me from doing what I threatened," cried Saxondale, "and therefore I will do it."

Thus speaking, he seized up a wax-candle from the mantel-piece and rushed out of the room, leaving the door wide open—while Emily, throwing herself upon the sofa, sent forth a merry musical laugh, which reached his ears as he dashed up the staircase.

Almost immediately afterwards the *soubrette* stole into the drawing-room; and bending over her mistress, said with frightened looks, "Good heavens, ma'am, he will be discovered!"

"What do you mean?" cried Emily, with unfeigned astonishment.

"Oh! you know well enough. Lord Harold——"

"Lord Harold?" echoed the *danseuse*. "He took his departure before Saxondale came."

"But he returned—he told me that I was to admit him—he went up-stairs—he is there now——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Emily, the truth instantaneously flashing to her comprehension. "But he will not find it though: for it is in a cupboard down stairs."

"Find what, ma'am?"

At this moment ejaculations of astonishment and rage, bursting from Saxondale's lips on the landing above, reached the ears of the *danseuse* and the *soubrette*. For a moment the latter looked dismayed: but the former, bursting out into a hearty fit of laughter, exclaimed, "Oh! this is excellent—this is delicious! Will it not be something to be talked about? Come, let us see!"

Meanwhile Lord Saxondale had ascended to the landing above; and thinking that if a lover were concealed in the house, it would not be in Emily's own chamber, he searched the one immediately behind it. Lord Harold Staunton, hearing him rush so quickly up the stairs, naturally fancied there was something wrong; and not wishing to quarrel with Saxondale at a time when he entertained matrimonial projects in respect to his mother, he thought to escape unperceived while his friend was in the back room, whither he had heard him enter. But just at the moment that Staunton was stealing forth, Saxondale came out again from that room; and they met face to face upon the landing. Then was it that ejaculations of astonishment and rage burst forth from Edmund's lips: for he was instantaneously struck by what appeared to be the perfidy of his bosom-friend. As for Staunton, he was really thrown quite aback; and his natural effrontery availed him not for the moment.

"This is too bad, Harold!" said Lord Saxondale, suddenly experiencing the most fiend-like hate against his former friend, but yet not having the courage to testify his resentment in a manly way.

Before Harold could make up his mind what response to give, Emily Archer, closely followed by the *soubrette*, came hurrying up the staircase,—the former laughing right merrily.

"Very well!" exclaimed Saxondale, white with rage: "this is no longer a place for me. Of course, Lord Harold, everything is at an end between us; and as I understand that you have been on a visit to the Castle, I hope that for decency's sake you will not again set foot in any house that will one day be mine."

Having thus spoken, and without waiting for any reply, — indeed, not without a fear that Harold might probably kick him down stairs,—Lord Saxondale turned abruptly round and sped away with a rapidity which had something ignominious in it, and almost gave him the air of being the injuring party instead of the one who was injured. Neither Harold nor Emily made a movement or uttered a word to retain him: for the former felt all the awkwardness of his situation, while the latter was perfectly indifferent so far as her late admirer was concerned—and indeed, was not sorry to be quit of him. But so soon as he had disappeared from her view, she suddenly ceased laughing;—and with a dignity which even the most depraved of women can assume at times, she advanced up to Staunton, saying, "You are a detestable villain!"

"Ah! these are harsh terms, Emily!" ejaculated the young nobleman, his countenance becoming suffused with crimson.

"Dare not address me in that familiar style!"—then turning to her *soubrette*, Emily said, extending her arm and pointing towards Harold, "That man is a robber—a lurking thief—a sneaking burglar!"

"By God! Emily, this is more than I can endure!" exclaimed Staunton, all the colour vanishing from his face and leaving it livid pale

"Yes—you are everything I have described. Begone, my lord!—or as true as I am a living woman, I will give you into custody for felony."

"I will make you repent this," muttered Harold between his teeth, as he passed by the *danseuse* and began descending the stairs.

"*You* will make me repent?" she exclaimed, in mingled mockery and indignation. "Begone, sneaking thief! I defy you."

Harold Staunton made no retort; but took his departure from Evergreen Villa—crestfallen, discomfited, baffled in every way

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE PHYSICIAN AND HIS NIGHT'S ADVENTURES.

It was the same night as that on which the incidents of the two preceding chapters occurred, and between eleven and twelve o'clock, that Dr. Ferney was engaged in his dissecting-room. Several apartments in the eminent physician's mansion,—which was situated in Conduit Street, Hanover Square,—have been minutely described in an earlier chapter: but the one to which we are now introducing the reader, was *not* noticed upon that occasion. It had a grim and ghastly appearance, as all dissecting-rooms have; and the atmosphere was damp, raw, and sickly, like that of death. All the *paraphernalia* necessary for anatomical purposes, met the eye;—and the floor, though carefully scoured after each dissection, retained upon its deal boards the ineffaceable marks of the fluids which flow from a corpse.

For some years past Dr. Ferney had seldom prosecuted this branch of his studies—unless indeed under some peculiar circumstances he obtained possession of a "subject." Such was the case on the occasion when we now penetrate into the dissecting-room; and there, by the light of a powerful gas-lamp suspended over the table in the centre, shall we find the medical man engaged in the dissection of a corpse.

It was the body of an elderly female, and was but little decomposed. Nevertheless, there was a certain discolouration of the skin, which the physician had not failed to observe the moment the corpse was drawn forth from the sack by the body-snatchers who had brought it to the house half-an-hour previously. That certain suspicions had entered Dr. Ferney's mind, was evident enough from the peculiar gravity which sat upon his pale pensive countenance: but with the imperturbability characteristic of his profession generally, and of himself in particular, he pursued his work steadily and apart from all excitement. For about an hour did he continue to use the scalpel,—laying open the throat which he carefully examined, and subjected to several tests—likewise the stomach, which he treated in a similar manner. At length he put aside his instruments—washed his hands in a bason that stood ready for the purpose—and all the while seemed to be reflecting profoundly what course he ought to pursue under circumstances of an embarrassing and perplexing nature.

When he had performed his ablutions, he looked at his watch and found it was near one o'clock in the morning. For a moment he hesitated whether to retire to his chamber and postpone till day-time the purpose which he had in view: but he felt that he should not be able to sleep until he had got it off his mind;—and issuing forth from the dissecting-room, he locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. He thence proceeded to his laboratory, where he unlocked a drawer, and taking out a phial with a sealed cork, assured himself that this seal had not been broken. Returning the phial to the drawer, Dr. Ferney now descended the stairs; and taking a latch-key with him, quitted the house. Proceeding to the nearest cab-stand, he entered one of the vehicles, and ordered the driver to take him to John Street, Clerkenwell.

On arriving in the vicinage of Cow Cross, Dr. Ferney alighted from the cab—desired the driver to wait for him—and entering a narrow dark alley, speedily reached that same knacker's yard which Lady Bess had visited when seeking an interview with old Bob Shakerly. This was likewise the individual whom the doctor came to visit. The old man was in bed; and not a glimmering of a light shone forth from any window of the wretched litt house which he inhabited close by the gate of his yard. However, Dr. Ferney was resolved not to be disappointed; and he accordingly knocked at the door until a window was opened—a head, with a night-cap on, was thrust out—and Bob Shakerly's voice demanded who was there?

"It is I, Dr. Ferney. I wish to speak to you most particularly."

"Coming, sir—coming in a few minutes," at once responded the old man; and drawing in his head, he closed the window, whence, almost immediately afterwards a light glimmered forth.

In a minute or two steps were heard descending the stairs within. The door was opened—and Bob Shakerly appeared, his scraggy form enveloped in an old dressing-gown, and his dirty cotton nightcap upon his head.

"Walk in, sir. Sorry to keep you waiting Nothink wrong, I hope? The traps hav'n't got scent of the job?"—and he surveyed the doctor with some degree of anxiety.

"No—nothing of that kind," answered Ferney, as he entered the house.

"That's all right, then," said Shakerly, much relieved. "Walk into this room, sir: it's not over tidy—for as I'm a bachelor, I've got nobody to make things neat and comfortable."

"No apology is necessary," answered the doctor, as he entered a little apartment where everything was dirty to a degree, although it was by no means poor in furniture.

"Sit down, sir—pray sit down:"—and Shakerly placed upon the table the candle which he had held in his hand. "Now, sir, what is it?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions," said the doctor. "Were you present with your men when that corpse was exhumed?"

"To be sure I was. It's very little—as you knows, doctor—that I does in that way now: but when any of my chaps tells me of a chance, why, I don't choose to let it slip through my fingers."

"Well, well," interrupted the physician: "we will not waste words. Did you notice whose name was upon the coffin-lid?"

"I always does," replied Shakerly; "and what's more, I makes a memorandum of it when I comes home, just for the fun of the thing—to see how many stiff 'uns I have had up in my time."

"What is the name of this woman you have brought me to-night?" demanded Ferney.

"Here it be, sir," answered Shakerly, taking out an old well-thumbed dog's-eared book from the table-drawer, and turning over some of the pages. "There, sir—you can copy it,—and there's pen, ink, and paper. But is there summut wrong?"

"Nothing that you can have anything to do with," responded the physician, as he copied on a slip of paper the last memorandum that stood on the page open before him. "I suppose you know nothing of the deceased woman herself—who she was—where she lived——"

"Nothink at all, doctor. But of course you can easy find out what you want to know from the parish clerk, the sexton, or the registrar."

"No doubt of it," said the physician. "Thank you—I need not detain you any longer—and here's something for the trouble I have given you."

Thus speaking, Dr. Ferney placed a sovereign upon the table as he rose from his seat; and though Shakerly showed an anxiety to ask him some questions, yet he dared not—for he knew the physician's disposition well, and that if he chose to reveal anything he would do so of his own accord. He accordingly held his peace—lighted the doctor to the door—wished him good night—and ascended to his bed-chamber again, wondering what it could all mean.

"It is strange—most strange!" thought Dr. Ferney, as he retraced his way to the cab; and entering the vehicle, he ordered it to drive to his mansion in Conduit Street.

On alighting at his own door, Dr. Ferney perceived two policemen at a little distance, lifting up a man from the pavement; and the words, "I am not tipsy—I am starving," uttered in tones of deep distress, reached the physician's ears.

Hastily paying the cabman's fare, he hurried up to the spot where the scene was occurring; and found that it was an old man—clothed in rags, and altogether in a most lamentable condition—whom the two officers had just raised from the ground.

"What is the matter with you?" inquired Dr. Ferney in a compassionate tone.

"I fear I am dying, sir," replied the old man. "But for God's sake, don't let me be taken to the station or the workhouse! Give me a morsel of food—and perhaps I shall be able to drag myself along somewhere."

"Do you know anything about him?" inquired the doctor of the constables: for with every inclination to assist the wretched object before him, he was well aware of the tricks played by street-impostors.

"No, sir—nothing," replied one of the policemen, to both of whom Dr. Ferney was well known. "We saw him fall down suddenly, and at first thought he was drunk: but it doesn't seem so."

"Well, the poor old man shall not be suffered to perish in the streets," said the physician; "and he seems to have a horror of the only places to which you could take him."

"I have indeed, sir," said the object of the doctor's sympathy. "I have seen somewhat better days; and though brought low, I may call myself respectable. Of course these rags do not seem to confirm my words," he added with a degree of bitterness: "but it is so, nevertheless."

Dr. Ferney saw that the poor old man had really a respectable look, despite his miserable garb; and moreover he spoke like a decently educated person, and in a tone of sincerity. Ferney accordingly directed the policemen to lead him into his house; and opening the door with the latch-key, he gave them admittance. The old man was borne into the dining-room, where he was deposited upon the sofa; and the officers took their departure. The servants had long been in bed: but Dr. Ferney hastened to procure refreshments, which he set before the object of his generosity. A glass of wine aided to revive the unfortunate old man, who poured forth his gratitude, not in the snivelling, whining tones of a canting hypocrite, but with the genuine sincerity of one who felt the immensity of the obligation he owed to a benefactor.

"Come," said the doctor, "you are better now—and a good night's rest will help to restore you. To-morrow you shall tell me a little more about your circumstances; and I will see if anything can be done for you. At all events, you shall not go away in those tatters—nor yet with an empty pocket."

The old man shed tears as the doctor thus addressed him: he endeavoured to speak again, but could not—for he was overpowered by his emotions. Dr. Ferney conducted him to a bed-room, and leaving him there, was about to ascend to his own chamber, when a loud and impatient knock at the front door sounded through the dwelling. The physician was by no means unaccustomed to be summoned at any hour in the night; therefore without waiting to let the footman get up and answer the knock, he at once hurried down stairs again and opened the street-door.

"Ah, doctor, you are up! So much the better," said the visitor, who was a tall, aristocratic-looking man, about thirty-six years of age, and remarkably handsome,—with a noble facial outline of the true Roman type.

A carriage, from which this individual had just alighted, was waiting opposite the door. The horses were splendidly caparisoned — the coachman and two footmen belonging to the equipage, were in handsome liveries—and a coronet appeared above the arms painted on the panels.

"I hope that nothing is amiss, my lord?" said Dr. Ferney, in reply to the visitor's somewhat excited ejaculations.

"Can you come with me at once?" demanded the nobleman. "Her ladyship——"

"Not another word is necessary, my lord. I will come directly:"—and the physician, putting on his hat, followed the nobleman into the carriage, which immediately drove away.

The personage by whose side Dr. Ferney now found himself seated, was the Earl of Castlemaine—a nobleman possessed of great wealth, but reputed to be of somewhat singular character and eccentric habits. He was married, and dwelt with his wife in a spacious and splendid mansion at Kensington. He was several years older than her ladyship, who was not above twenty-three, and of great beauty. They had no children; and it was whispered that they lived somewhat unhappily together. Indeed Dr. Ferney, who was their physician, had every reason to believe that this rumour was based upon truth: for he was well aware that for the last three or four years they had occupied separate chambers. Nevertheless, during the day-time they were as much together as husband and wife usually are in the higher circles: that is to say, they took their repasts together—they were occasionally seen riding out in the same carriage—and they likewise appeared together in society. The Earl of Castlemaine was a man of reserved, an even moody disposition,—habitually taciturn, and with a countenance which, though so handsome, was nevertheless inscrutable in its expression: so that in those moments when he appeared gayer than at other times, it was difficult for an observer to determine whether this gaiety were sincere—and in his taciturn moods it was equally impossible to obtain a clue to what was passing in his mind. His habits were regular—his character was reported to be unimpeachable—his servants considered him to be a good master: but amongst persons of his own rank and standing, although he had plenty of acquaintances, he had no friends. That is to say, he did not seek to cultivate the friendship of any one; and the inscrutable singularity of his character prevented others from endeavouring to form a close intimacy with him.

Although it was thus whispered that Lord and Lady Castlemaine lived not together upon the happiest terms, yet no aspersion was thrown on the character of the latter. Her conduct appeared to be marked with the strictest propriety: she never displayed the slightest levity; and though she went into society, yet it rather seemed as if it were in fulfilment of one of the inevitable conditions of her rank and position, than because she had any taste for the frivolous gaieties and hollow pleasures of fashionable life. She never danced—never joined those who were seated at the card-tables—but she would play on the piano or the harp, when requested; and accompany either instrument with her voice. She was a beautiful musician, and sang with a delicious sweetness,—in which a kind of melancholy pathos was invariably blended with the harmony of a voice of a perfect *contralto*—but a *contralto* that was clouded as if coming from a throat accustomed to stifle and keep down

the gushing emotions of the heart. Her manners, though slightly reserved, and always properly dignified, were affable and unaffected; she was a lady whom everybody possessing a kind heart, could not help liking, and around whom there was a species of mysterious interest, investing her as with a halo.

We have said that Lady Castlemaine was beautiful; and while we are thus introducing her to our readers, we may as well pause for a few minutes longer to describe her more accurately. She was of medium stature, but finely made—uniting richness of proportions with an admirable symmetry. The superb slope and form of her shoulders, the least thing rounded, but not to mar the uprightness of her figure, suited well the fullness of the bust, the contours of which were set off in a noble relief by the thinness of the waist. Her hair was of a dark brown, with perhaps the slightest tinge of auburn in it; so that it shone with a more velvety gloss in the lustre of a drawing-room, or when the sunbeams rested upon it. Her eyes were not large, but dark, and with their natural fires somewhat subdued into softness by the general air of melancholy which pervaded her look. Her nose was quite straight—her mouth small and rich: her chin could not be called rounded, but was just sufficiently elongated to render her countenance a perfect oval. Her teeth were white and faultlessly even; and there was an exceeding beauty and sweetness, though mingled with melancholy, in her smile. There was a certain languor about her at times—yet not the languor of voluptuousness. In the eye of the libertine her beauty might,—on account of this very air of languor, combined with the richness of her charms,—appear to be of a sensuous type: but the closer and more delicate observer could not fail to perceive that this languor on her part was that of a soft pervasive melancholy which influenced her entire being.

We should add to the above explanations, that Priscilla—the Christian name of this lady—had been married about seven years to Lord Castlemaine. She had therefore been conducted to the altar when she was only sixteen; and those who knew the Earl and his bride at the time, affirmed that it was entirely a love-match, and that they experienced an undoubted affection for each other. But, as already stated, for the last three or four years a change appeared to have come over one or both of them; and during this interval they had not only occupied distinct chambers, but likewise separate wings of the spacious mansion. What could be the cause of this coolness between a husband and wife whose matrimonial career commenced under such smiling auspices? No one could conjecture: for even in a sphere where the tongue of scandal was ever ready to catch up the faintest whisper of detraction, and give currency to it with exaggerations growing as it passed from lip to lip—yet not an aspersion had been thrown out against the moral purity of Lady Castlemaine. Some had supposed that her husband's temper was of a most unfortunate kind, although he had the good taste and a manly dignity sufficient to conceal it before the world: but others would object that the natural sweetness and amiability of Priscilla's disposition, would lead her to bend and adapt herself to any infirmity of temper on her husband's part. To be brief, no one could satisfactorily account for the coolness subsisting between this couple; and it was supposed that not even the domestics themselves (some of whom had been for years in his lordship's service) could solve the mystery.

The reader has now obtained as great an insight as we are at present enabled to afford, into the characters and circumstances of the Earl and Countess of Castlemaine; and it was by the side of this nobleman that Dr. Ferney found himself seated in the carriage at about three o'clock in the morning, he not having been in bed the whole night. For several minutes after they had entered the vehicle, there was a profound silence. The physician could not help feeling, or at least suspecting, that there was something more than usually singular in the Earl's look and manner on coming to fetch him; and this idea was strengthened in his mind when so many minutes elapsed and yet his lordship volunteered no more specific explanation than he had already hinted at as the motive for fetching him. On the other hand, the Earl himself appeared to be buried in profound reverie; and though by the twilight of dawn the doctor could perfectly well discern the countenance of his noble companion,—yet, as usual, he could trace no index to his thoughts upon his handsome but inscrutable countenance.

"How long is it since you saw Lady Castlemaine?" inquired the Earl, at length breaking silence, not abruptly, but in a slow, deep, and measured voice.

"As nearly as I can recollect, my lord, it must have been two months," responded the physician.

"And was it to prescribe for her ladyship then, that you saw her?" asked the nobleman.

"No—I think not, my lord. If you remember, it was you yourself, who were unwell at the time."

"To be sure—I do recollect. Then it is possibly some months—three or four," added the Earl, "since you last visited her ladyship professionally?"

"It must be at least for so long a period as your lordship has named," replied Dr. Ferney.

The Earl of Castlemaine made no farther remark at the moment; but falling back in the carriage, he folded his arms over his breast and appeared to sink into a moody reverie. He was a man of dark complexion, with coal black air, and eyes to match; and thus there was something that might almost be termed terrible in the aspect of that countenance when thus clouded with inscrutable thoughts. The doctor eyed him furtively, and could not help thinking that there was something wrong, and which had caused himself to be thus hurriedly fetched by the Earl in person, and at such an hour. Perhaps any other individual save Dr. Ferney would have put direct queries upon these points—or at least have inquired what ailed her ladyship: but the physician had not the slightest particle of worldly curiosity in his composition—at the same time that his feelings were of so delicate a nature that under such circumstances as the present, he did not even choose to appear inquisitive where no spontaneous explanation was at once volunteered.

The carriage rolled on; and the Earl of Castlemaine continued wrapped up in silence and impenetrable gloom. His brows, which were naturally high-arched, were contracted,—thus giving a scowl

ing look to his face: his lips were compressed—and though the nature of his thoughts could not be decyphered, yet was it full evident that it was no agreeable topic on which he was pondering. The doctor, finding that he did not renew the conversation, threw himself back in his corner of the carriage, and gave way to his own reflections. He thought of the discovery he had made in respect to the anatomized corpse—his visit to Bob Shakerly at the knacker's yard—the old man whom he had taken into his house: and he thought likewise, as indeed he often and deeply thought, of that unknown lady whom he had loved so long, and with such a profound, constant, enduring affection!

The horses went quick; and in less than half-an-hour from the moment they had started from the physician's house in Conduit Street, the equipage dashed through the iron gates of the railings fencing the grounds in the midst of which the Earl of Castlemaine's mansion stood. The gas-lamps were still burning beneath the portico; and the moment the vehicle stopped, the hall-porter opened the front-door. Lord Castlemaine alighted, followed by the doctor; and he led the way up a splendid staircase, into a drawing-room where lights were burning.

"Sit down," said the Earl: "for I must speak to you for a few minutes. Her ladyship," he continued, after a brief pause, during which he appeared to nerve himself as it were with an effort to give expression to what he was compelled to say, "was taken ill just now on our return from a party at the Duke of Harcourt's. I do not know that her illness is at all dangerous—I do not think it is:" and his lips curled strangely as he thus spoke—it might be in scorn—it might be with other emotions—but which it was impossible to decide. "At all events, doctor," he continued, "you will soon ascertain: and observe! I desire that you communicate to me the exact truth."

"Wherefore, my lord, should you address me in this manner?" asked the physician, with a certain dignity not unblended with indignation in his looks. "If you have no faith in me, I cannot consider it an honour that you have called me in upon this occasion."

"My dear Dr. Ferney, you must not be angry with me," said the Earl of Castlemaine, taking the physician's hand and pressing it with more warmth than he was generally accustomed to display. "But perhaps you will understand me better presently. You can now ascend to her ladyship's chamber—you know the way—I shall await you here."

The physician accordingly quitted the drawing-room; and mounting the next flight of stairs, reached a landing whence two long, carpetted, and splendidly decorated corridors branched off — one to the right wing of the building, the other to the left. In the latter, and at the extremity of the corridor leading thither, the Earl of Castlemaine's own private chambers were situated: while precisely at the opposite extremity—namely, in the right wing—was the elegant suite of apartments occupied by her ladyship. Dr. Ferney, who knew the way well, turned into the brilliantly lighted corridor leading to the rooms of the Countess; and passing by some admirable specimens of sculpture—some immense Chinese vases, exhaling perfumes—and some smaller ones filled with flowers, he reached the door of the ante-chamber. Knocking gently, it was immediately opened by the principal lady's-maid of the Countess. She was a woman of about forty—highly respectable—discreet and reserved—not given to gossipping nor scandal—and devotedly attached to her mistress. She was weeping—and, indeed, looked much distressed. The moment the door was opened, the doctor's ear caught wild and delirious cries; and he recognised the voice of Lady Castlemaine.

"Is your mistress very bad, Mrs. Broughton?" inquired Ferney, as he entered the ante-chamber.

"Oh, sir—she is raving. For God's sake, come!"

Mrs. Broughton accordingly led the physician through a sitting-room fitted up with mingled costliness and taste—thence into a boudoir furnished in a still more elegant manner—and thence again into a spacious and handsome bed-chamber, where Lady Castlemaine was sitting upon a sofa, giving vent to those delirious cries which the doctor had heard, and struggling with two of her maids. The elegant apparel which she had worn at the ball, had been torn off her—a morning wrapper enveloped her form—her hair was hanging in disorder over her half-naked shoulders—her face was pale—her features were distorted: there was frenzy in her looks, and delirium in her ravings. But the moment Dr. Ferney made his appearance, she either recognised him, or else became overawed at the presence of a man—and instantaneously ceasing her cries, threw herself back upon the sofa.

Dr Ferney bade the two junior maids retire for the present, while he remained alone with Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Broughton. Then he spoke in soothing tones to her ladyship: but she did not appear to comprehend him. She gazed in a sort of vacant wildness upon his countenance for several minutes: then suddenly placing her hands before her eyes, she gave a subdued shriek and sank back insensible. The proper restoratives were administered; and when the Countess was returning to herself, the other maids were summoned from the adjoining apartment to convey her to her couch. Scarcely however was she deposited in the bed, when the ravings of her delirium broke forth anew: and Dr. Ferney wrote a prescription which he desired might be sent off to the nearest chemist's at once. The two junior maids were again dismissed from the room; and when they had retired, Dr. Ferney, taking advantage of a temporary lull on the unfortunate lady's part, said, "Tell me, Mrs. Broughton, how all this came about."

"My lord and her ladyship," replied the woman, scarcely able to subdue her sobs as she spoke, "returned home at about a quarter to two o'clock, from Harcourt House; but the moment her ladyship alighted from the carriage, she was seized with a fainting fit—and his lordship taking her in his arms, bore her up-stairs to this chamber. I and the other maids, not hearing the carriage arrive, were not immediately in attendance. But I was the first to come hither; and I found his lordship tearing off my lady's apparel to give her air."——Here Mrs. Broughton hesitated for a few moments, and then added in a low voice and with hesitating manner, "Soon afterwards his lordship suddenly broke away, saying that he would fetch the doctor: and then, sir, he went for you."

"I understand," observed the physician.

Some more conversation took place between himself and Mrs. Broughton, but which we need not lay before the reader. In half-an-hour the medicine for which he had sent, was brought: but in the meantime the delirium of the Countess had broken forth anew—and it was with some difficulty that she could be forced to take the composing draught. At length however it was poured down her throat; and in a few minutes its effects became visible in the lull of her excited mind which followed.

The physician remained with her ladyship for another half-hour, and having given Mrs. Broughton certain requisite instructions, he quitted the sick chamber, promising to return again by noon. He then descended to the drawing-room, where he had left the Earl of Castlemaine, and whom he found walking to and fro, with his arms folded across his chest, and his looks bent down. He did not immediately perceive the physician: for the room was spacious, and the door opened noiselessly. The doctor accosted him; and the Earl, stopping suddenly short, bent upon him a look which, with all the power of his piercing dark eyes, seemed to search into his very soul.

"Dr. Ferney, what is the matter with her ladyship?" he demanded, in a deep hollow voice—so changed indeed from its natural tones that if the physician had heard it in the dark, he would not have recognized it.

"Her ladyship is exceedingly ill," was the response rendered by Ferney; "and must be kept as quiet as possible. I have given Mrs. Broughton the fullest instructions——"

"But what is it?" exclaimed the Earl, now manifesting impatience.

"I hope and trust," answered the physician, "that her ladyship will in a few hours become composed and regain the powers of her intellect. But I charge your lordship to avoid anything that may excite her. If this advice be not attended to, I will not answer for her reason—no, nor yet for her life. She is in a more dangerous state than your lordship ere now appeared to imagine."

"But what is it, I again ask?" ejaculated the Earl; and an indescribable expression, which had something demoniac in it, passed convulsively over his dark countenance.

"Her ladyship," responded the physician, who evidently trembled lest the announcement he had to make should not be a pleasant on—or rather he had the certainty that it would not,—"her ladyship is in a way to become a mother."

"Ah, I thought so! Enough, doctor:"—and the Earl of Castlemaine instantaneously became sternly and unnaturally cold. "Of course you will come and see her soon again?"

"I have intimated to Mrs. Broughton that I shall return about noon: but if any threatening symptoms should arise, I must at once be sent for."

"No doubt, doctor," responded the Earl, who was still cold, severe, and ominously implacable. "I have ordered my carriage to wait to convey you home."

Dr. Ferney then took his leave; and entering the vehicle, was speedily whirled back to his own mansion. But during the ride thither, he reflected sorrowfully and with apprehension, upon the circumstances of the case which had thus required his presence.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE TITLED LADY AND THE OPERA-DANCER.

It was about noon—on the day following the evening of Harold Staunton's interview with Emily Archer at Evergreen Villa—that Lady Saxondale was walking by herself along the bank of the Trent at a short distance from the castle. She was pondering upon many subjects, few if any of which were very pleasurable—and least of all the one for which she had specially despatched Lord Harold Staunton to London. Her ladyship could not blind her eyes to the fact that within the last few weeks the aspect of her affairs had become most threatening: the sky of her destiny had grown suddenly overcast—and from every quarter did the storm of calamities threaten to burst forth. Within this interval a new crime had been perpetrated, which weighed upon her conscience notwithstanding that iron resolution of soul which she possessed, and which often rose superior even to the qualms of the secret monitor within. And then, too, she had fallen from that pedestal of female honour and chastity upon which, since her husband's death nineteen years back, she had stood so proudly. Yes—she had fallen in a manner but little calculated to mitigate the sense of self degradation! Had she fallen to throw herself into the arms of him whom she loved—the arms of William Deveril—it would have been different: but she had fallen, only to sink into the embrace of one whom she hated—Lord Harold Staunton! This was a fall, therefore, accompanied by utter humiliation; and though she was inspired not by any true principle of virtue, yet her pride was deeply wounded. She felt that she was sacrificed to terrorism, and not to love: she had yielded herself up to expediency, and not to passion; and these reflections were accompanied by a profound sense of self-loathing.

And now, too, she asked herself if Lord Harold's mission should fail, what course was she to adopt? It was but too evident that Mr. Gunthorpe was resolved, on Deveril's part, to pursue extreme measures. Oh! how she hated that Mr. Gunthorpe, how bitterly—deeply—cordially, did she hate him! How she would have rejoiced to be enabled to inflict upon him some direful vengeance! Again, too, she could not help thinking that there had been something singular in Florina's conduct towards her for the last two or three days:—nothing very pointed—no overt display of aversion or pique—but a certain cold reserve, the cause of which her ladyship could not conjecture. Nay, more the experienced eye of Lady Saxondale had even discerned an inward struggling on Florina's part, to conceal, if not to conquer, that coldness—but without success. It was evident therefore that the young damsel had learnt something concerning her: or was it mere vexation, because Lady Saxondale had exposed William Deveril amongst all her fashionable acquaintances? No: this could scarcely be the solution of Florina's coldness: for the young maiden's demeanour towards her ladyship, had not been that of an uniform reserve ever since the first day when Lady Saxondale told her story of Deveril's alleged impropriety: but it was a change of conduct that Florina had manifested only within the past two or three days.

Altogether, Lady Saxondale's reflections were very far from being of an agreeable character, as she took her rambles along the bank of the river. She had come forth alone, for the purpose of communing with herself. Mr. Hawkshaw was with Juliana and Florina in the garden: Lady Macdonald had remained in-doors to read her books or amuse herself with her knitting: and thus there was no one to intrude upon her ladyship's solitary walk.

It was noon, we said; and the patrician lady had rambled to a distance of about a mile from the castle, when she was suddenly aroused from her reverie by the noise of an approaching equipage; and looking towards the road, she perceived a post-chaise hastening in the direction of the mansion. It was evident that she herself was observed and recognized by the occupant of that chaise, who thrusting his head out of the window, ordered the postilion to stop. He then quickly alighted; and Lady Saxondale at once saw that it was Lord Harold Staunton

Her first thought was one of joy and satisfaction,—believing that he had successfully accomplished his mission: but her second reflection was the very reverse—for it struck her that as he approached, there was nothing reassuring upon his countenance.

"Have you succeeded?" she at once said, without a single word of prefatory greeting: "tell me, have you succeeded?"

"I am compelled to say that I have not," he replied. "I have travelled post since the middle of the night——"

"Then you have very disagreeable intelligence for me?" interrupted her ladyship, becoming pale, and gazing fixedly and searchingly upon Harold's countenance. "Speak!—you must of course perceive how useless—indeed, how worse than useless it will be to mislead me."

"I have no such intention," responded Staunton, somewhat sharply. "Does not the speed with which I have travelled sufficiently prove that I consider your interests identical with my own?"

"Then, without more words, explain what has happened."

"You may expect a visit from Emily Archer——"

"The dancing-girl—Edmund's mistress!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with mingled excitement and disdain.

"Yes: and if I mistake not, she will be here this evening But rest assured, Harriet," continued Staunton, "that it is through no understanding with me nor any arrangement on my part, that she is coming."

"Then you must have managed matters very badly," rejoined Lady Saxondale; "and the promises you held out of settling this business, have proved delusive enough."

"I could not foresee the turn that things would take," answered Staunton. "I did my best. Of Alfred, my valet, we can make sure; and there is one thing satisfactory in respect to Emily Archer—that she has not gossipped upon the subject. But she is mercenary as a Jewess, and is resolved to extort a much larger sum than I could possibly have anticipated."

"And wherefore could you not write to me upon the subject? why not keep her in London until you received fresh remittances from me?" demanded Lady Saxondale impatiently.

"The girl showed a spirit for which I was not prepared—and she demanded no less a sum than—— But I shall frighten you with the amount."

"Name it—name it!" cried her ladyship.

"Ten thousand pounds."

Lady Saxondale stopped short in the stupor of amazement.

"Yes—such is her exorbitance," continued Lord Harold: then in a tone of increased vexation, he added, "Altogether my visit to her was an unfortunate one. She would not negotiate with me, but declared that she would come direct to you. I thought that if I could procure possession of the masquerade-dress we might defy her—or at least bring her more easily to terms. I accordingly contrived to steal up to her chamber, where I searched for the dress. I was unsuccessful. By some means or another, Edmund's suspicions were excited that there was a rival in the house; and he discovered me in that chamber. There was an explosion—a quarrel——"

"Ah! you have quarrelled with Edmund?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Yes—and he bade me observe that for decency's sake I was never again to set foot within either the town-mansion or the Lincolnshire castle. And now you know everything."

Lady Saxondale made no immediate response, but reflected deeply for several minutes. If the aspect of her affairs had seemed perplexing previous to Lord Harold's return, it now appeared ten thousand times more threatening. What was she to do? how was she to act? The circumstances in which she was placed required leisure for the most serious meditation.

"You had better return to the chaise and proceed on to the castle," she at length said to her companion. "No one there need know that you alighted to speak to me; and when we meet presently, it will be as if I were previously unaware of your return."

"Perhaps we shall not have another opportunity of conversing alone together, ere you receive Emily Archer's threatened visit."

"We can decide upon nothing till I *have* seen her," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "It will be time enough *then* to deliberate upon the course that is to be pursued."

"You are cold—distant—reserved, Harriet," said Staunton.

"How would you have me be towards you?" demanded Lady Saxondale, still speaking in a glacial voice: then, as her tones suddenly changed into mocking accents, and as a smile of withering irony writhed her lips, she said, "I imagine that if the exposure which we have been trying to ward off, should take place—if William Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe should pursue their law-process and overwhelm me with shame and dishonour,—I suppose, Lord Harold, that you will not *then* be so very anxious to accompany me to the altar?"

"What have you to fear if Emily Archer can be silenced?" asked Staunton, not giving a direct reply to the question so homely put.

"But think you that I will submit to the extortions of that woman?" exclaimed her ladyship, with fire flashing from her eyes. "What? ten

thousand pounds! and who knows but that she will double the amount of her demands when she finds that I yield to her first stipulation? No—Emily Archer must be dealt with in some other way. And now return to your chaise. It is useless to prolong the discourse at present."

With these words Lady Saxondale turned abruptly round, and began retracing her steps towards the castle. Lord Harold Staunton stood irresolute for nearly a minute; and he was half inclined to rejoin her ladyship and seek an explanation of those ominous words to which she had just given utterance. But with a cold shudder he feared to have their meaning completely cleared up; and therefore hurried back to the chaise, which quickly conveyed him on to the castle.

As he alighted at the entrance-gates, he met his sister Florina, who had discreetly left Juliana and Mr. Hawkshaw to walk by themselves in the garden, knowing that the latter was paying his court to the former.

"Ah, Flo!" said Harold, in the usual careless, indifferent manner with which he was accustomed to treat his sister. "Lounging about by yourself—eh?"

"You have returned unexpectedly, have you not?" inquired Florina, with a look of somewhat anxious scrutiny at her brother's appearance, which sufficiently indicated that he had not been in bed all night.

"Oh! I was desirous to get back," he answered, assuming an off-hand manner. "You know, when I went away I promised to rejoin you as soon as possible. But you look strange, Florina? Has anything happened? What is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied the young damsel. "You seem as if you required rest,—you have doubtless travelled all night——"

"Yes—I shall go and lie down for an hour or two:"—and thus speaking, Lord Harold Staunton hastened into the castle.

"Oh, my poor unhappy brother!" murmured Florina to herself, as she turned abruptly away and proceeded along the bank of the river. "What will become of you, if you are indeed, as I suspect, by some means ensnared in the meshes of Lady Saxondale?"

Hours passed away—evening came—and the company at the castle assembled at the dinner-table. Mr. Hawkshaw had been invited to remain: and he of course sat next to Juliana, towards whom his attentions were so marked that Lord Harold Staunton had no difficulty in perceiving he was paying his court to her. Lady Saxondale did the honours of the table with her wonted display of good-breeding; and it would have been difficult for a casual observer to discern the agitation of a troubled soul beneath that external self-possession. Florina was silent and pensive: for not even Deveril's parting injunction, that she was to dissemble for a short period the unpleasant thoughts which his revelations had excited in her mind, could lead the young damsel so far to play the hypocrite as to appear joyous or gay when she was receiving the hospitality of a woman whom she alike dreaded and loathed, and while she was trembling for the welfare of a brother whom she knew to be ensnared in that designing woman's trammels.

After dinner the whole party descended into the garden, where they soon divided themselves into couples—Juliana and Mr. Hawkshaw pairing off into one avenue—Lady Macdonald and Florina into another—and Lord Harold Staunton remaining alone with Lady Saxondale. But scarcely had the two last-mentioned thus found themselves together—and ere a single syllable of any consequence had passed between them—the sounds of a travelling equipage dashing up to the castle, but concealed from their view by the trees, reached their ears.

"This is doubtless the Opera-dancer," said Lady Saxondale. "If so, I shall see her alone. Do not attempt to make your appearance: for after all you have told me, I question whether she would be over well pleased to meet you."

"But what course do you purpose to adopt?" inquired Harold, gazing earnestly upon Lady Saxondale's countenance.

"I must be entirely guided by circumstances," rejoined her ladyship.

A domestic now made his appearance, with the intimation that a lady, who had just arrived in a post-chaise, sought an immediate interview with the mistress of the castle.

"Did she give her card or name?" asked Lady Saxondale, with perfect self-possession.

"No, my lady," returned the domestic. "She said that as she was unknown to your ladyship, it was useless to do so."

"I will see her," said Lady Saxondale: and she accordingly re-entered the castle, the footman indicating the apartment to which the visitress had been shown.

As the door was thrown open and Lady Saxondale crossed the threshold of that room, she armed herself with all her patrician dignity—invested herself with all her haughty pride; and drawn up to her full height—stately as a queen, yet elegant and graceful in all her movements—she accosted the visitress, who rose from the seat which she had taken. At a glance Lady Saxondale scanned her from head to foot. She saw that she was handsome—that she was dressed with more magnificence than taste—and likewise that she possessed a hardihood and an effrontery well calculated for the business upon which she had come. Indeed, the spirit of the visitress was such as to prevent her from experiencing the slightest embarrassment on finding herself in the presence of the haughty and brilliant Lady Saxondale, whom however she regarded with some little degree of curiosity; for though she had occasionally seen her in her box at the Opera, and also in her carriage in the park, yet this was the first time that she had ever looked her face to face.

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" inquired her ladyship, with a cold politeness, and seeming as if she entertained not the slightest idea of who her visitress was.

"Perhaps your ladyship may have heard of Mademoiselle D'Alembert?"

"No, never—at least not to my present recollection," responded Lady Saxondale, pretending to reflect, as if she were taxing her memory: and still by remaining standing, she sought to keep the *dansense* standing likewise.

"And yet I have seen your ladyship at the Italian Opera," resumed Miss Archer, whose pride was hurt at the thought of her name being so utterly unknown to Lady Saxondale.

"It may be so: but one of course does not know everybody who frequents places of public amusement."

"Our conversation is likely to be a long one," said Emily; "and as I am fatigued with travelling by railway and by post-chaise, you will permit me to be seated:"—saying which, she deposited herself in a free and easy manner upon a sofa, and unfastened the ribbons of her bonnet to give herself air—for the evening was close and sultry.

"Now perhaps," observed Lady Saxondale, likewise taking a seat, but with a cold, distant, formal air, as if to rebuke the familiarity which her visitress seemed inclined to display,—"now perhaps, you will have the goodness to inform me for what purpose you have sought this interview."

"Does your ladyship really mean me to understand," exclaimed Emily, "that my name is unknown to you? Well, of that no matter. I will speedily explain who I am. At the Italian Opera I am Mademoiselle D'Alembert—where I condescend to dance, apparently for the diversion of such as your ladyship who lounge in the boxes, but in reality because it suits my whim and gratifies my pride. But at my own house, Evergreen Villa—where I live in excellent style—my name is Miss Archer; and it is as Miss Archer that I now introduce myself to your ladyship. I may add that your son Lord Saxondale has recently been a very intimate friend of mine—until last night, when I picked a quarrel with him for the express purpose of causing a lasting breach between us. A certain Lord Harold Staunton," pursued Emily, with a significant and half-malicious smile, "who I believe is well known to your ladyship, can explain these particulars the next time you see him."

The *danseuse* delivered herself of this speech in a sort of half-flippant, half-familiar manner, which stirred the proud soul of Lady Saxondale to its nethermost depths; and she looked coldly stern and supremely haughty as she bent her gaze upon Miss Archer.

"You have introduced yourself, it is true," said her ladyship: "but the object of your visit is as yet unexplained."

"It is really difficult for me to believe that your ladyship has no suspicion of the object of my visit," resumed Emily: "but if it be so, explanations are easily given. In short, your ladyship has only to reflect whether there be anything at all peculiar in respect to yourself and Lord Harold Staunton, in order to arrive at a complete idea of my purpose."

"You are speaking in a manner which is almost sufficient to induce me to order you from my presence."

"No—your ladyship will do nothing of the kind," was Emily Archer's cool response. "I can read the human countenance well enough; and at this moment while I am addressing you, there is a certain trouble in your's—though I must confess that it would escape the notice of any one who was not a very close observer. Now, in plain terms," continued Miss Archer, "I am confident that you *do* know that Lord Harold Staunton called upon me last night in London and made certain proposals to me. He offered me monies which could not have possibly been his own, and which you must have therefore placed in his hands—or at least promised to furnish for a particular purpose."

Lady Saxondale bit her lip with a vexation which she could not possibly control. She had endeavoured to overawe the *danseuse*—to brow-beat her—to reduce her, in short, to that state of submission in which it would be comparatively easy to dictate her own terms, instead of having terms dictated to herself. But in this aim she was frustrated by the cool self-possession—we might almost say the impudent effrontery, of Mademoiselle D'Alembert: and therefore her ladyship perceived it to be necessary to go upon quite another tack.

"Will you, in a few words," she said, "tell me precisely what you demand? There need be no farther explanation between us in the form of preface or prelude. I am well aware—indeed I do not attempt to deny, that there is some foolish and absurd scandal existing against me in certain quarters; and unfortunately my own son has, in his natural thoughtlessness, given encouragement to it. It were easy for me to ridicule the scandal and scorn the scandalmongers; but the world is so wicked, that it is not always prudent to make light of such matters; and therefore, if your stipulations be at all reasonable, I do not know that I shall refuse to accede to them."

"I require ten thousand pounds," replied Emily Archer; "on which condition I will give up a certain dress that I have in my possession."

"Your terms are exceedingly high, Miss Archer," responded Lady Saxondale: "although, as a matter of course, the sum you have named is but a trifling one to me."

"Oh! in that case," exclaimed the *danseuse*, "I cannot consent to bate one farthing; and indeed your ladyship ought to be very much obliged to me for not doubling the amount of my demand."

"Were you to hint at such a thing," rejoined her ladyship, "I would close the negotiation at once. But so far as ten thousand pounds go, I will offer no objection. You have the dress with you, you say."

"It is in the post-chaise which has brought me hither from Lincoln. My maid, who accompanied me, has it in charge."

"You must be well aware, Miss Archer," resumed Lady Saxondale, "that I have not so large a sum as ten thousand pounds in the castle at this moment."

"Your ladyship's cheque upon your London banker will fully answer the purpose," observed the *danseuse*.

"That I cannot give. My bankers would be surprised at my drawing so large a draught in favour of a young lady engaged at the Opera. It would be immediately believed that I was encouraging my son in a certain course to which I will no farther allude. To-morrow I can procure the money in notes and gold from my banker at Gainsborough; and therefore," continued her ladyship, "if you do not mind waiting in Lincolnshire until to-morrow evening——"

"Oh! I have not the slightest objection," exclaimed Emily. "It will suit me well. I will return at once to Lincoln. Name your own hour, Lady Saxondale, when I can meet you here to-morrow."

"You cannot be at all surprised if I adopt some—as I think, necessary—precaution in respect to this second interview which must take place."

"Stipulate your own conditions: they shall be attended to."

LADY CASTLEMAINE.

Lady Saxondale appeared to reflect for some minutes: and then she said, "It must be at a somewhat late hour to-morrow evening when our interview takes place; and it cannot be within the castle-walls. I should be exposed to a thousand disagreeable suspicions if you were to visit me here again. As it is, I shall have to invent some excuse to account for your present appearance here. Do you think, however, that your maid—whom you say you have with you in your chaise—is likely to gossip with my domestics?"

"I am convinced she will not, my lady. I gave no name on my arrival; and therefore you may recognise every inclination on my part to conduct this negotiation with as much delicacy as possible. In the first place, my servant does not know the object of my coming, nor what the masquerade-dress we have brought with us has to do with my visit; and in the second place, she will not mention my name to your servants, even if they speak to her while she waits in the chaise."

"I thank you, Miss Archer, for these assurances," resumed Lady Saxondale, whose tone and look had gradually been displaying more affability and condescension since that point in the discourse at which she went off on her new tack. "I am now better able to suggest the requisite arrangements for our interview of to-morrow evening. In the first place, you must remove to-morrow from Lincoln to Gainsborough. This latter town is but a few miles distant from the castle; and there is a pleasant walk along the bank of the river, so that without even inquiring your way, you cannot possibly mistake it. Will you to-morrow evening—say at about half-past nine o'clock—meet me on the bank of the river midway between Gainsborough and the castle?—and the matter can be settled at once. I shall come provided with the money: you on your part will have the masquerade-dress."

"But your ladyship has no objection that I should be accompanied by my maid?"

"Not the slightest—on condition that you do not tell her whom it is that you are to meet: for however trustworthy you may consider her, I by no means wish to place myself in her power."

"May she not recognise your ladyship?"

"Not through the dark veil that I shall wear—nor in the disguise that I shall adopt in my apparel altogether."

"But are there no other means, Lady Saxondale," inquired Emily Archer, not altogether relishing the extreme mystery of the arrangement, "by which the negotiation can be completed? If, for instance, I were to meet you at Gainsborough to-morrow when you visit your banker——"

"No, Miss Archer—I am so well known at Gainsborough that I cannot risk being talked about. Unless indeed the whole affair be managed with the utmost secrecy, it will not be worth my while to give one single shilling to seal your lips."

"Then be it as your ladyship has decided," rejoined Emily. "For my part I do not object to whatsoever precautions your ladyship chooses to take."

"You must understand that they are indispensably necessary," said Lady Saxondale. "But one word more. If you maintain the strictest secrecy in respect to all these proceedings—and if the end of a year from the present time you have kept in your own bosom whatsoever you know concerning my affairs—you may present yourself again to me, and I will give you five thousand pounds more as a final and closing reward."

"Your ladyship may depend upon me," exclaimed Emily, scarcely able to conceal her joy at these golden results of her negotiation.

She then rose to take her leave—first however advancing up to one of the splendid mirrors in the apartment, and tying the strings of her coquettish French bonnet: then with a theatrical curtsey, which made the ample folds of her rich satin dress swell out like a balloon all around her, Mademoiselle d'Alembert quitted the apartment. She descended to the post-chaise which was waiting; and taking her seat inside the vehicle, from which her attendant *soubrette* had not alighted, was speedily on her way back again to Lincoln.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE THOROUGH-BRED.

On the following day Mr. Hawkshaw arrived to lunch at Saxondale Castle, shortly after one o'clock, according to invitation given him by the lady of the mansion herself ere he took his departure on the previous evening. He came on a most splendid thorough-bred horse, of which he had spoken the day before, and concerning which Lord Harold had expressed some degree of curiosity. During luncheon, Staunton renewed the conversation relative to the horse; and Mr. Hawkshaw launched forth into enthusiastic eulogies of its brilliant qualities,—at the same time describing it as one which only a fearless rider would venture to mount.

"Perhaps," said Lord Harold, with a smile, "you are not aware, Mr. Hawkshaw, that I am considered by my friends to be a most excellent equestrian; and if you will permit me the opportunity, after luncheon, I will convince you whether I am afraid to take your horse at the highest gate we can find in the fields round about."

"I request, Harold, that you will not be so foolish," said Florina, who, notwithstanding her diminished opinion of her brother's rectitude of principle and worth of character, nevertheless still entertained for him too great a sisterly regard not to be frightened at this proposed venture on his part.

"And I also must interpose my authority," said Lady Macdonald: "that is to say, if I possess any—which indeed I hope I do. For people in our sphere of life——"

"My dear aunt," interrupted Staunton,—"and you also, Florina, I cannot possibly listen to your fears: or rather you must permit me to tell you both that they are quite unfounded. Have I not been out hunting often? did I not ride at the celebrated Dunchurch steeple-chase?"

"But, my lord," said Lady Saxondale, with an air of grave remonstrance, "I think that your aunt and dear Flo have given you most excellent advice; and if you will allow me to add the weight of mine, I must beg that you think no more of riding Mr. Hawkshaw's horse—at least not for the purpose of taking any desperate leaps."

"What does Mr. Hawkshaw himself say?"

asked Juliana. "For he of course is the best judge respecting the danger to be incurred."

"You shall see me take a gate first," replied the Squire; "and then you four ladies can constitute a jury to decide whether Lord Harold shall attempt the same achievement."

"Indeed, if there be any danger," said Juliana, throwing a look of alarm upon her lover, "I cannot think of permitting even *you* to try the feat."

"Danger, my dear Miss Farefield!" exclaimed the Squire, at the same time rewarding her with a look of grateful rapture: "there is none for a really good horseman."

"Nevertheless," said Lady Saxondale, "I would much rather that Lord Harold should follow the advice which his aunt and sister have given him. It is foolish to run risks of this kind."

"Well, we shall see," ejaculated Harold, rising from his seat. "Come, Mr. Hawkshaw—you and I will go down to the stables and have the horse brought out; and the ladies will perhaps join us presently in the park."

No objection was offered to this proposal, and the two gentlemen accordingly withdrew. The ladies then ascended to their chambers to put on their walking attire; and in about half-an-hour they all four traversed the gardens and entered the park, where Mr. Hawkshaw was already mounted on his splendid horse, showing off its paces to Lord Harold Staunton, who admired the animal exceedingly.

"Let us proceed," said the Squire, "towards yonder palings. There is a five-barred gate in that barrier."

Juliana walked by the side of the steed which her admirer rode: and true to the tactics which she had so skilfully adopted, first to captivate and afterwards to secure Mr. Hawkshaw's heart, she talked to him of nothing else but his favourite steed.

"Pray, Harold," said Florina, taking her brother's arm, "do not attempt anything rash. Do not, I beseech you! An accident so soon occurs."

"How is it, Flo," inquired Staunton, "that you are so very anxious concerning me all of a sudden?"

"How can you talk in this manner, Harold?" said his sister, gazing up at him reproachfully as she walked by his side.

"Oh! I thought you were rather cool to me yesterday after my return—and likewise this morning. I did not know, however," continued Staunton, "in what way I had offended you——"

"But whatsoever amount of offence you might give me, Harold," interrupted his sister, "I should still be anxious concerning you all the same; and therefore I beg that you will undertake nothing rash. Of course I am no judge of horses; but it seems to me that Mr. Hawkshaw's is very spirited, and that it is one which only a person accustomed to ride it, and who therefore knows it well, ought to attempt any bold feat with."

"Well, my dear Flo," returned Harold carelessly, "we shall see all about it presently. Pray don't alarm yourself beforehand."

Lady Saxondale and Lady Macdonald had followed at a little distance, and were conversing on the same subject—the former being to all appearances quite as averse as the latter that Staunton should take so daring a leap with a steed which he had never ridden before.

In a few minutes the palings skirting the park were reached; and a halt was made. There was a very high gate in that boundary; and this was the one which Mr. Hawkshaw proposed to leap. Juliana raised her eyes towards him with a look of tenderness and alarm—so that the Squire could scarcely refrain from bending down and giving utterance to a few words expressive of his rapture at the interest which she thus demonstrated on his behalf. Yet he did restrain himself; because the period which he had prescribed for courtship ere avowing his passion, had not yet passed: but then he looked all he would have said, and the eloquence of his eyes told a tale satisfactory enough to the intriguing and selfish Miss Farefield.

Taking a proper distance—but with the unconcern and fearlessness of a man who knew perfectly well what his horse could do, and what he himself might in all safety venture—Squire Hawkshaw galloped the steed at the gate and cleared it in the most beautiful style, to the admiration of those who beheld him. Cantering into the middle of the field on the other side of the park-railings, he wheeled the horse round—galloped it back again at the gate—and leaped over in the same admirable manner as before.

"There!" he said, springing from the steed as he reached the spot where the ladies had remained standing with Lord Harold: "you see that anything can be done with this horse."

"Then I am sure that I need not fear to venture," said the young nobleman: and he advanced to take the bridle from the Squire's hand.

"No, Harold!" cried Florina: "do not, I beseech you—do not!"

But by the time she had uttered these words, her brother had sprung upon the horse; and gallopping away, he made a wide circuit, not only to settle himself well upon the animal's back and try its paces for himself, but also to convince the Squire that he was no mean equestrian.

"Your ladyship need fear nothing," said Mr. Hawkshaw, addressing himself to Florina: "for your brother is quite capable of doing with that horse whatsoever I can do."

"But you are such a superb rider," remarked Juliana in an undertone, accompanying her compliment with a tender look.

"Lord Harold is as good as I am," returned the Squire, surveying Staunton's equestrian performance with the eye of a *connoiseur*. "See, he is going to take the gate! Stand back a little. Pray, don't be afraid, ladies! I can assure you he is all safe. It is perfectly right—he knows what he is about. Why, he sits upon the back of that horse as if he formed part of it. There—away he goes!"

And away Lord Harold did go, clearing the gate in as fine a style as Mr. Hawkshaw had already twice done. But all in an instant shrieks burst forth from the ladies, and an ejaculation of alarm from the Squire: for scarcely had Staunton leapt the gate, when he disappeared from the horse's back—the steed gallopped on—and he was left lying in the field.

"O heaven, he is killed! he is killed!" was the wild cry that issued from Florina's lips: and she sprang frantically towards the gate.

"Do not be alarmed, dear Flo," said Harold,

half raising himself, but apparently with great pain; and then he sank back again.

The gate was opened—and in a moment he was surrounded by all the party. He was very pale, and looked up with anguish on his countenance. Florina threw herself upon her knees by his side, while Mr. Hawkshaw assisted her to raise him. Lady Macdonald was excessively alarmed—Lady Saxondale seemed so—and Juliana was frightened as much as it was in her nature to care for anybody.

"Where are you hurt, Harold? For heaven's sake, speak!" cried his sister, full of anguish. "Oh, do speak, Harold!—tell me where you are hurt."

"It is nothing—beyond a mere fall—a few bruises," murmured Staunton, as if with difficulty giving utterance to the words.

Mr. Hawkshaw ran his hands over Lord Harold's arms and then his legs; and finding that he did not give vent to any expression of pain, the Squire at once concluded that no bones were broken.

"Stand up, my lord—let us assist you to rise. There!" he exclaimed, as he and Florina together helped Staunton to regain his feet. "How do you feel now?"

"Better—much better: I am only bruised. Run and get your horse, Hawkshaw: I can stand alone now—or at least supported on my sister's arm. Thanks, dear Flo, for the kind interest you take in me."

Mr. Hawkshaw, now perfectly assured that nothing very serious was the matter with Lord Harold, hastened in pursuit of the steed, which he soon caught; and on leading it back to the spot where the accident had occurred, he found Staunton leaning against the gate surrounded by the ladies, who were receiving his assurances that he only felt very much shaken, but that there was nothing serious to apprehend. To his sister's proposal that medical assistance should be sent for, he gave a decisive negative,—declaring that he had experienced on former occasions more severe falls than the present one.

"The best thing you can do, my lord," said Hawkshaw, "is to get back to the castle and go to bed. You must lie up for two or three days, at the end of which time you will be perfectly recovered."

"Decidedly I shall follow your advice," responded Staunton. "Come, let me lean on your arm, Flo—and your's too, aunt: for I feel somewhat weak—which is to be expected."

"God be thanked it is no worse!" said Lady Macdonald, as she gave her nephew her arm, while Florina fervently echoed her elderly relative's words.

"I can't fancy how the deuce you could have managed it," said Mr. Hawkshaw, leading his horse by the bridle, as the party moved slowly onward towards the castle. "You cleared the gate in beautiful style: nobody could have done it better. I watched you as narrowly as possible the whole time; and it seemed to me that when landing on the opposite side, you were as firm in your saddle as at the moment the horse made the spring. But all of a sudden you disappeared as if shot by some unseen hand."

"I myself can scarcely tell how it did occur," replied Harold, speaking in a voice that seemed very feeble and weak. "I don't know whether it was a sudden dizziness, or a loss of balance—or whether the horse shied at the moment——"

"No, that I can swear he didn't!" exclaimed Hawkshaw: "he never swerved a hair's-breadth to right or left, but went straight on as he always does. However, the harm's done: and there is no more use in talking about it. At the same time, my lord, I don't think that your reputation need be considered damaged as a good equestrian: for you certainly took the gate gallantly, and there is no mistake about that."

The party reached the castle; and Lord Harold was conducted up to his chamber, where he got to bed, declaring his intention of remaining there for a day or two. The incident appeared to throw a damp upon the spirits of every one—the gloom being genuine in some respects, feigned no doubt in others. Mr. Hawkshaw, who was a generous and frank-hearted man, expressed himself in the kindest terms relative to Harold; and two or three times in the course of the day he ascended to his lordship's chamber to inquire how he felt. Florina would have remained there altogether to attend upon her brother: but Harold preferred being left alone, as he said that the shock which he had sustained had left an exceeding drowsiness behind it. Mr. Hawkshaw stayed to dinner, which was served up as usual between six and seven o'clock. He and Juliana walked out together in the garden afterwards,—the other ladies remaining in-doors. Between eight and nine o'clock the Squire and Miss Farefield ascended to the drawing-room, where Lady Saxondale, Lady Macdonald, and Florina were seated.

"How gets on the patient?" asked the Squire. "With your ladyship's permission I will pay him another visit; and then perhaps he will like to be left quiet for the rest of the evening."

"Do so," responded Lady Saxondale, to whom the remark was addressed. "I will accompany you. And, Florina—perhaps you will come with us?"

The three accordingly proceeded to Staunton's chamber; and in answer to their queries he said that he felt very stiff and sore—that he was much bruised—and feared he should be unable to leave his chamber for some days. Florina again urged the necessity of having professional assistance: but her brother said that it was useless—and Mr. Hawkshaw himself did not consider it to be by any means necessary, adding that a good night's rest would do wonders for him.

"We will therefore leave his lordship to his repose," said Lady Saxondale. "The bell-pull is within your reach; and I have given orders that your slightest wants or wishes are to be attended to."

"My grateful thanks are due to your ladyship," replied Staunton, with as much respect as if not the slightest improper intimacy had ever taken place between himself and the splendid mistress of the castle.

Her ladyship, Florina, and Mr. Hawkshaw wished Harold good night, and quitted the chamber,—returning to the drawing-room, where they reported to Lady Macdonald and Juliana how the patient was getting on.

"I must now leave you to amuse yourselves as best you can for ten minutes or a quarter of an

hour," said Lady Saxondale, "while I repair to the library to write a few letters."

Thus speaking, she quitted the room. But her absence was not longer than she had specified; and on her return she sat down to join in the conversation with her daughter and her guests.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A TRAGEDY.

It was about half-past eight o'clock on this same evening of which we are speaking, that Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril set out on foot from an hotel at Gainsborough, where they had arrived during the afternoon; and they proceeded along the bank of the river towards Saxondale Castle. The sun had gone down half-an-hour previously: the twilight was waning—the dusk was setting in—but by the appearance of the evening there was no probability of the darkness being so great as to render the walk by the side of the Trent at all dangerous. Deveril, moreover, had been there before, and perfectly remembered the various features of the route.

"I wonder whether the fellow Chiffin will keep his appointment," said Mr. Gunthorpe, after they had walked a considerable distance—and it was now past nine o'clock.

"I think there can be no doubt of it," replied Deveril. "The man is evidently one who will do anything for money; and the prospect of receiving a large reward from you, sir, will win him over to our interests. But really I am quite ashamed when I think of all the trouble you are taking on my behalf—and what is more still, all the money you are spending."

"Stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe petulantly. "How often am I to tell you not to address me in that way? If you ever speak to me again in such terms, I shall think that you mean intentionally to offend me."

"No, my dear sir—you cannot think *that:* because you know it to be impossible. On the contrary, you would doubtless consider it very extraordinary if I did not express all my gratitude towards you. Ah! it was here," suddenly exclaimed Deveril, "that I rescued that strange woman from drowning; and yonder is the cottage to which we were both conveyed. You perceive that glimmering light?"

"Yes," said Mr. Gunthorpe; "and I tell you what, William—I feel uncommonly thirsty; and we will just step out of our way that much, and call upon those good peasants. There is plenty of time: for Chiffin will of course wait for us. That confounded soup at the hotel in Gainsborough was so salt that it has left my throat as dry as if I had been eating red herrings."

Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril accordingly turned away from the bank of the river and approached the cottage, which they reached in a few minutes. On knocking at the door it was opened by the peasant himself, who instantaneously recognizing Deveril as the light from the room streamed upon his countenance, gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise and joy.

"This is kind of you, sir, to come and see us again! Walk in, sir. Mother, here is Mr. Deveril—and another gentleman along with him."

"They are both heartily welcome," said the old woman, making her appearance; and in the kindness of her heart she grasped Deveril's hand.

Our young hero and Mr. Gunthorpe entered the little sitting-room of the cottage, where the old woman's daughter welcomed Deveril in her turn. But there were two other persons in this room—two females. One was handsomely dressed, and had the air, if not exactly of a lady, at least of a person in good circumstances; while the other, who appeared to be her maid, carried a large brown paper parcel in her hand. It immediately struck Deveril that he had seen the countenance of the lady before: but he could not at the instant recollect when or where.

"Sit down, gentlemen," said the old woman, bustling about to give Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero chairs: "there's plenty of room. Well, we *have* got company this evening! Who would have thought it? This lady and her maid have taken a longer walk than they meant to do, as they say—and were so tired they were obliged to step in and sit down for a few minutes. But what will you take, gentlemen? Our fare is humble, yet such as it is, you are most welcome."

"My friend here," answered Deveril, "is exceedingly thirsty. A draught of water, or milk——"

"Or cider?" exclaimed the old woman. "We have got some good cider; and this lady and her maid have pronounced it excellent."

"Yes—that assurance I can certainly give you, gentlemen," said the handsomely-dressed female, who had never taken her fine dark eyes off Deveril since the first moment he entered the cottage: for she was evidently struck by the exceeding beauty of his person, as well perhaps by having heard his name mentioned by the old woman's son when he made his appearance.

Deveril bowed courteously as she spoke; and again it struck him that he had seen her before.

"If it be not impertinent, sir," she said, "are you the Mr. Deveril whose name created so much sympathy on a recent occasion?"—then as our hero again bowed, though somewhat distantly—for he did not much like the hardihood of his questioner's looks,—she exclaimed, "Ah! I am well acquainted with Lord Harold Staunton, and his intimate friend Lord Saxondale too."

"Do you come from London, then?" inquired Mr. Gunthorpe, in his blunt manner.

"I reside habitually in London," was the response; "but a little business has brought me down into these parts. I dare say," added the lady, "that my name is not unfamiliar to you, gentlemen. I am Mademoiselle D'Alembert of the Italian Opera."

"Ah!" ejaculated Deveril, now instantaneously recollecting where he had seen her countenance before.

"Yes—that is my name," she continued, flattering herself that it was in admiring surprise that the young gentleman had sent forth that exclamation. "But come," she added, addressing herself to her *soubrette;* "we must be off."

Rising from her seat, she ostentatiously took from her purse a sovereign, which she tendered to the old woman of the cottage, who literally confounded

herself in curtseys at this unlooked-for liberality; but Mademoiselle D'Alembert, turning abruptly away with the air of one who does not require thanks for any evidence of her bounty, said in a sort of half-whisper to our hero, "If, on your return to London, Mr. Deveril, you would favour me with a call at Evergreen Villa, in the Seven Sisters' Road, Holloway, I shall be happy to receive you."

"I thank you, Mademoiselle," replied William, bowing coldly and distantly: "but I shall not be enabled to avail myself of your polite invitation."

The large dark eyes of Emily Archer flashed with sudden fires—her countenance became crimson—she bit her lip, and was evidently about to give utterance to some angry ejaculation, for she was deeply mortified: but restraining herself, she passed on without saying a word, flouncing indignantly out of the cottage, followed by the *soubrette*, who turned up her nose with a half grimace at both Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe as she whisked by them.

"Ah! they be London folks, I see," said the old woman. "They give their gold—but they also give theirselves airs."

The cider was now produced. Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril each took a glass, and pronounced it excellent.

"I wonder what that woman and her servant can be doing out here at such a time in the evening," observed Mr. Gunthorpe to our hero. "It's very strange—is it not? But didn't she say she was acquainted with Lord Saxondale? Perhaps she has come after him. However, it's no business of our's:" —then turning to the peasant woman, he said, "You behaved most kindly to my young friend here on a recent occasion; and though I have no doubt he testified his gratitude, yet you must permit me to show mine on his behalf."

With these words Mr. Gunthorpe put five sovereigns upon the table—and then hurried out of the cottage, accompanied by William Deveril, but followed to the door by the old woman, her son, and her daughter, who all three poured forth their most heartfelt gratitude for this proof of generosity. And true generosity it was—the money being given from motives of the purest kindness, very different indeed from the ostentation which had ere now accompanied the gift of Emily Archer.

Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril sped away from the cottage, and in a few minutes reached the bank of the river, where they were almost immediately joined by Chiffin the Cannibal, who was coming from the direction of Saxondale Castle. The ruffian had his club under his arm, and his hands thrust into the pockets of his great rough shaggy coat: his battered white hat was cocked a little on one side—and the blue smoke was curling up from the bowl of a short pipe which he held in his mouth.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "so you are come according to appointment? My eyes, what a lark I have just had! There was two women a little way farther on in that direction,"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder towards the castle; "and when they saw me they screeched out as if they took me for a highwayman. Now really, gentlemen, I think I look a trifle more respectable than *that*—don't I?"—and Mr. Chiffin gave a deep chuckling laugh at what he considered to be the merriness of his conceit.

"Ah, I suppose they are the same we saw just now at the hut," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Is it possible that they are going to the castle?"

"Well, it looks like it," responded Chiffin. "But, I say, gentlemen—if anything is to be done to-night, we must look sharp. For it's now close upon ten o'clock: and at eleven, you know, her ladyship will peep into the chapel of the castle to see if I am there."

"Well," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "you are to introduce us thither along with you. I suppose there are plenty of places where we can be secreted, while you hold your discourse with her ladyship?"

"Plenty," answered Chiffin. "There's the steps leading from the vestiary down into the vaults; you can stand there just inside the door. Or what's better perhaps, there's the tombs, behind one of which you can hide as nice as possible; 'cause why, I can walk as if quite promiscuous in there, while chatting with her ladyship. But mind, whatever she wants done I am going to ask a blessed high reward; and if she agrees, you've got to double it."

"The bargain is well understood," answered Mr. Gunthorpe. "But now tell us how you propose to introduce us into the castle: for we don't want to stand the chance of being shot at like burglars."

"No fear of that, sir," replied Chiffin. "It's on the western side that overlooks the river. The wall comes flush down into the water——"

"Then how the deuce are we to get in?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Why, you see, sir, the river's quite shallow—not knee deep—all along just under the wall; and it goes shelving down so gradual that there's no chance of getting out of your depth. Then there's a precious great tree that grows right up out of the bed of the river against some of the windows; and there's a thundering big bough that goes right bang across one of them windows—and it's as easy climbing up that tree as if it was a ladder. You ain't the thinnest person in the world, sir: but you can manage this here business with no more bother than if you was walking up-stairs. There's a precious sight nastier tree than that to climb, I can tell you, gentlemen—a leafless one that they sometimes set up at the debtors' door of Newgate;"—and the Cannibal again sent forth that low deep chuckle which was horrible to hear.

"Come, a truce to this jesting," said Mr. Gunthorpe sternly.

During the above colloquy the two gentlemen and Chiffin had been walking hastily in the direction of the castle. At the very moment that those last words had issued in a tone of rebuke from Mr. Gunthorpe's lips, the report of a pistol from a little distance reached their ears. This was followed by a shriek in a female voice; and quick as thought, a second report of a pistol was heard. Then all was still.

"Good God, what is that?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe.

An ejaculation likewise burst from Deveril's lips; and the two gentlemen, accompanied by Chiffin, rushed along the bank of the river in the same direction they were already pursuing—namely, towards the castle: for it was in that same direction whence the pistol-shots and the scream had emanated.

In a few minutes they beheld something dark lying across the pathway ahead: another minute, and they distinctly perceived that there were two

objects. The next minute brought them up to the spot—where, to the unspeakable horror and dismay of Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril, and to the astonishment of Chiffin, they beheld the forms of two females stretched upon the ground.

"The same we saw at the cottage!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, as soon as he could recover the power of speech—while Deveril, stooping down, pronounced life to be extinct in both.

The countenance of the unfortunate Emily Archer was dreadfully disfigured, the pistol-bullet having evidently penetrated her forehead, shattering all the upper part of her head. The *soubrette* had been killed by a ball penetrating her heart—for that side of her dress was saturated with blood. It was a sad—a ghastly—a shocking spectacle: and both Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero shuddered from head to foot, as if stricken with an ice-chill.

"Well, I'm blowed," said Chiffin the Cannibal, "if it isn't a deuced lucky thing for me that I was with you gentlemen at the time: or else you would have been sure to say it was me as did it."

"What, in the name of heaven, is to be done?" exclaimed Deveril, addressing himself to Mr. Gunthorpe, but glancing towards Chiffin: then in the Italian language he said, quickly and whisperingly, "If this man is seen with us, we shall be accused of the deed!"

"True," replied Mr. Gunthorpe, now recovering his presence of mind, but still trembling from head to foot with feelings of indescribable horror: then thrusting his hand into his pocket, he drew forth a quantity of notes and gold, and giving them to Chiffin, said, "Begone! Stay not here for another moment—or no power on earth could make the authorities of justice believe that you are innocent of this!"

"Right enough!" ejaculated the Cannibal, clutching the money with avidity. "But what about the business yonder?"—and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards the castle.

"Is it possible that you think of staying in this neighbourhood?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe.

"No—I should rather think not," was the Cannibal's quick response.

"Then away with you!" cried both Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril in a breath.

Chiffin sped off across the fields, away from the vicinage of the river, and was speedily lost to the view.

The colloquy just recorded had scarcely occupied a minute—during which Deveril looked about in every direction to see if he could discover the slightest trace of the path which the murderer or murderers had pursued: but there was no indication to lead him to any such discovery. Indeed, it was evident enough that the flight of the author or authors of the terrible deed must have been exceedingly precipitate: for at the moment when Gunthorpe, Deveril, and Chiffin had first come up to the spot, no sound of retreating footsteps had met their ears—no form vanishing in the distance had caught their glance. One circumstance Deveril now observed—which was, that the parcel the *soubrette* carried in her hand when at the cottage, had disappeared.

"Now what is to be done, sir?" asked Deveril, so soon as the Cannibal had taken his departure.

"Hasten you to the hut, and bid the peasant repair with all possible speed to Gainsborough—or else to the nearest county magistrate—that information may be given."

"And you will remain here?" asked Deveril.

"Yes—certainly," rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe. "We must take care that the bodies of these unfortunate women are not touched until the authorities have seen them."

"But if the murderers should return, you might not be safe? Suffer me to wait here and keep watch, while you repair to the cottage."

"No such thing, William! Do as I bid you. Begone at once!"—and Mr. Gunthorpe spoke in a very peremptory manner.

Deveril accordingly offered no farther remonstrance—but hastened back to the cottage, which was about a mile distant. The inmates were just shutting up the place in preparation for retiring to rest: but they were not as yet in bed. Deveril knocked loudly and impatiently with his clenched hand at the door; and when it was opened, his pale countenance and horrified looks at once showed that something dreadful had occurred. His tale was quickly told; and it naturally produced consternation and dismay on the part of the old woman, her son, and daughter. The man himself, as soon as he had regained his self-possession, at once declared his readiness to hasten to Gainsborough with whatsoever message Deveril thought it right to send; and our hero accordingly bade him use all possible despatch and inform the local constabulary of what had occurred. The peasant set off on his errand; and William Deveril hastened to rejoin Mr. Gunthorpe, whom he found pacing to and fro on the bank of the river close by the spot where the murdered women lay stretched.

Two hours elapsed, during which Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero remained upon the scene of the awful crime that had been perpetrated. But little was the conversation that passed between them: their feelings were too highly wrought—too full of horror and consternation—to enable them to enter upon deliberate discourse. As for any conjecture relative to the author or authors of the crime, they could offer none. It was indeed shrouded in the darkest, deepest mystery: for according to the appearance presented by the bodies of the murdered women, it was evident their persons had not been rifled.

To add to the utter discomfort of the position of the gentlemen, the sky grew overcast and the rain began to fall—at first only drizzling, but in a little while descending more sharply—until at length it poured down in torrents. They had no umbrellas: but they stood up under the thick canopy of a neighbouring tree, and thus avoided being completely drenched by the rain.

At the expiration of the two hours they heard persons advancing along the bank of the river from the direction of Gainsborough; and half a dozen individuals soon made their appearance. These consisted of a magistrate, a surgeon, and some constables, accompanied also by the peasant. In a few words Mr. Gunthorpe explained to the magistrate the circumstances under which himself and Deveril had discovered the murder. The lanterns which the constables had with them, were lighted,—the position in which the bodies lay was

carefully noted by the authorities—and the magistrate then decided upon having the corpses conveyed to Gainsborough. Some hurdles were procured; and upon these the bodies were placed. The procession then set out along the bank of the river, through the deluging rain, towards the town.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE CHAPEL.

We left Lady Saxondale and her guests seated together in conversation in one of the magnificent drawing-rooms of the castle, after a visit had been paid to Lord Harold's chamber. Lady Saxondale herself had retired for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour to the library, as she stated, to write a letter or two; and on her return to the drawing-room she joined in the conversation which was progressing at the time. Mr. Hawkshaw sat with Juliana a little apart from the rest; and though they both mingled in the general discourse, yet he found an opportunity of manifesting these little attentions and paying those assiduities which belong to the pleasing ceremony of courtship. Florina was, alone of all the party, desponding and abstracted. She was previously in low spirits before the accident occurred to her brother; and that circumstance had naturally tended to depress her still more. Lady Macdonald, satisfied that there was nothing alarming in her nephew's position, had regained the wonted equanimity of her disposition: Lady Saxondale studied to render herself as agreeable as she could—and such an attempt on her part was never made in vain. Towards Mr. Hawkshaw she was particularly courteous and affable—although there was nothing in her manner to show that she played the part of a manœuvring mother endeavouring to secure an eligible husband for her daughter. Nor indeed was it at all necessary for her to lend her aid in the matter: as Juliana had played her cards so well that Mr. Hawkshaw was ensnared, to all appearances, beyond the possibility of self-emancipation from the thraldom of love.

At about ten o'clock supper was served up; and Florina suggested that as her brother had taken but little refreshment since the accident of the morning, he might possibly require some now. She accordingly intimated her intention of ascending to his chamber to make the inquiry.

"I will accompany you, Flo," said her ladyship, displaying all the concern of a generous hostess with regard to an invalid guest.

The two ladies thereupon quitted the room, and ascended to Lord Harold's chamber. On reaching the door, Lady Saxondale said in a whispering voice, "If he sleeps, Flo, it will be a pity to disturb him. Let us enter very carefully indeed."

Lady Saxondale accordingly opened the door with the utmost caution, and listened upon the threshold. The wax-lights were burning upon the mantel; and her ladyship, motioning with her hand for Florina to remain where she was, advanced on tiptoe towards the couch: then having peeped between the curtains, she retreated in the same noiseless manner towards Florina, to whom she whispered, "He is sleeping soundly."

The young lady was pleased by this announcement—because the circumstance appeared to indicate an absence of pain on her brother's part, and therefore that he had in reality received no serious injury. Lady Saxondale closed the door again with the same caution she had displayed on opening it; and, accompanied by Florina, she retraced her way to the apartment where the supper was served up.

"What news?" inquired Mr. Hawkshaw, who throughout had shown the most generous interest on Lord Harold's behalf.

"Our patient is sleeping soundly," replied Lady Saxondale with an air of great satisfaction.

"So much the better," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You may depend upon it that in a day or two he will be all right again. If he suffered much pain he would not be sleeping in that manner."

Florina was well pleased to hear an opinion which thus confirmed her own hope; and she felt somewhat more cheerful. It was nearly eleven o'clock before Mr. Hawkshaw took his departure; and ere he withdrew, he asked Lady Saxondale to be allowed to ride over in the morning and make personal inquiries relative to the invalid. This permission was of course accorded; and the Squire's horse having been gotten in readiness, he left the castle.

Immediately after he had thus taken his leave, the ladies withdrew to their respective chambers.

It was now eleven o'clock: and Lady Saxondale, on reaching her own room dismissed her maids for the night, with the intimation that she intended to sit up reading a little while ere she sought her couch. In about a quarter of an hour—when she thought the household was quiet—she stole forth from that chamber, and proceeded to Lord Harold's. There she remained only a few minutes, in conversation with the young nobleman; and on issuing forth again—instead of returning at once to her own room—she proceeded along the galleries leading to the western side of the castle. She extinguished the candle which she carried in her hand, and felt her way through the gloom of those corridors to the chapel—on entering which, she closed the door and then re-lighted the candle, having brought matches with her for the purpose. This precaution she adopted to prevent any of the inmates of the castle perceiving, from the opposite side of the court-yard, a light moving along the galleries of the uninhabited portion of the building.

Scarcely had she thus obtained a light again, when the sounds of footsteps reached her ears; and forth from the place of tombs emerged the unmistakable form of Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Ah! you have come at last?" said Lady Saxondale.

"Yes," was his growling response: "but I had a deuced great mind not to venture here at all to-night—for there's a precious rum thing took place at a little distance, about two or three mile away towards Gainsborough."

"And what is that?" demanded Lady Saxondale, fixing her eyes upon the ruffian in a penetrating manner.

"Why, nothing more nor less than a double murder," responded Chiffin.

"A double murder?" echoed her ladyship. "What do you mean? Have you——"

"No, not I: and it's a precious lucky thing for

MADEMOISELLE D'ALEMBERT.

me that I had witnesses to the contrary—or else, if I had been seen lurking about in these parts——"

"Witnesses?" ejaculated her ladyship. "Do you mean me to understand that you brought any of your companions or friends with you?"

"Nothing of the sort," interrupted Chiffin. "But I will tell your ladyship all about it——"

"The murder? Speak of that first. Who has been murdered? and what mean you by a double murder?"

"I mean what I say—that there is two young women lying dead—or at least I left them there—on the river's bank, both killed with pistol-bullets. I heard the report; and so did two gentlemen that was there at the time."

"And you would have me believe," said her ladyship, now fixing her eyes with a still more peculiar look than at first upon the Cannibal, "that this is not your work?"

"It's so like mine that your ladyship can't very easy believe it isn't: but it isn't though for all that."

"And these women? You say that you have left two gentlemen upon the spot——"

"I have got a little tale to tell your ladyship; and then you will see," continued Chiffin, "that I am a right staunch, trustworthy kind of a fellow. But first of all you must tell me what you wanted me down here for—and all about it."

"I do not require your services just at present," answered Lady Saxondale. "Circumstances have changed. But of course I shall reward you for your trouble; and it may be that in two or three weeks I shall need your aid. I will however write to you again. Here, take this packet: it contains a recompense which I have no doubt will satisfy you. And now what have you to tell me?"

"Of course," replied Chiffin, taking the little parcel, and weighing it for a moment in his hand so as to calculate the probable amount of gold it might contain, "your ladyship will consider that what I am going to tell you is worthy of a farther reward?"

"Go on, go on," interrupted Lady Saxondale impatiently. "You have already received sufficient proofs that I know how to behave liberally."

"Well, you see, ma'am," resumed the Cannibal, "t'other night two gentlemen came to me at Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town, and very perlitely introduced themselves as Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with a visible start; and her face, already pale this night, grew paler still. "But proceed. What did they require of you?"

"They told me that Mr. Deveril was at Gainsborough when your ladyship posted that note to me—that he saw it posted—and that he knew it was you that posted it—and what's more, too, he saw the address."

"But this is absolutely impossible!" cried Lady Saxondale, in mingled amazement and consternation.

"You are deceiving me—you have betrayed me!"

"Oh, well—if that's your opinion," observed the Cannibal gruffly, "I may as well be off."

"No, no: proceed with what you have to say. Go on—I will not interrupt you again."

"Well, ma'am—that's what the gentlemen said," continued Chiffin; "and they further stated that for certain reasons of their own they were uncommon anxious to see the contents of the letter. So, as there was nothing particular in it, I did show it to them."

"You showed it to them?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale angrily, and also in terror.

"Well, I thought it best: they seemed so positive that you had written it—and I couldn't possibly deny it."

"But what in heaven's name must they think now?" murmured Lady Saxondale in accents of despair.

"Don't you see, ma'am, I was acting in your interest? I wanted to draw the gentlemen out, and ascertain what object they had in view. So I pretended to tumble into their schemes; and they said that whatever reward you offered me for doing what you required, they would double it. Then they said that they should come down here into Lincolnshire, and I must manage to make them overhear what was to take place betwixt you and me. Now you know how it was they were in these parts to-night. But a very few minutes after I had joined them, we heard the report of pistol-shots: we rushed along the bank, and found the two dead bodies. Then the gentlemen got frightened at my being with them: they didn't think me quite respectable enough, I suppose—and so they bundled me off at once, giving up their scheme of getting into the castle. At first I thought of cutting away out of the neighbourhood as hard as I could: but then I reflected that it was better to come and see your ladyship, and tell you what is in the wind in respect to Mr. Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe. So I made a circuit and got back again to the castle—and that's all I have to tell you. Now, if your ladyship thinks this is worth anything——"

"Yes: you know I shall reward you," interrupted Lady Saxondale, impatiently. "But did you really mean to introduce these personages into the castle?"

"Well, to speak the truth," answered Chiffin, "I should have done so: but then I should have took uncommon good care to tip you a wink, or drop you a word in a whisper, not to talk on any serious business. The fact is, I wanted to see this matter out with them two gentlemen; and that's all about it."

Lady Saxondale said not another word; but drawing forth her purse, which contained notes and gold, she emptied it into the Cannibal's hand. His eyes glittered with a horrible reptile light, as he thought to himself that what with the money he had received from Mr. Gunthorpe, and the two separate sums he had just obtained from Lady Saxondale, he had made an excellent evening's work of it.

"And so, ma'am, you have nothing more for me to do to-night?" he resumed, as he consigned the money to his pocket.

"Nothing. When I need your services again, I will write to you. You will do well to get out of this neighbourhood as quick as possible."

"I mean to do so. Thank you for the advice, ma'am: I have no inclination to get took up on suspicion of doing what I didn't do."

"But one word more," said Lady Saxondale. "It is probable that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril may seek you out again. If so, can I rely

upon your letting me know what they want of you? You are well aware that your reward will not be deficient."

"Depend upon it, ma'am—you shan't be kept in the dark," responded Chiffin.

"But still one word more!" remarked Lady Saxondale, after a few instants' deep reflection. "You are going back to London——"

"Yes: I shall walk all the rest of this night."

"Well, well, you are going back to London, I say—and no doubt Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril will be going back to London also. Now, if they should both visit you again at that place in Agar Town, are there no means——But you understand me?"—and the lady looked with dark and ominous significancy at the Cannibal.

"Well, I think I do, ma'am," he replied, a horrible leer corroborating his words. "Yes—it's quite possible for them two gentlemen to tumble down into a cellar at the *Billy Goat* and break their necks—or disappear somehow or another in such an unaccountable way that their friends shall never know what the deuce to think of it——"

"I do not wish to hear any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale: then in a low murmuring voice, she added, as she again fixed her eyes with a look of deep meaning upon the Cannibal, "But this much I may say—I dislike those two persons so much that if you did happen to come with the intelligence that they had disappeared so unaccountably as you state, I think that in my satisfaction I should make you a present of a couple of thousand guineas."

"Ah! that's something like!" exclaimed the Cannibal, a ferocious joy appearing upon his countenance. "Not another word, ma'am, upon the subject. I dare say you will see me again before long."

"Every Monday and Thursday night," added Lady Saxondale, "at eleven o'clock, I shall look into the chapel. And now you must take your departure."

Chiffin delayed not to follow this intimation, and succeeded in effecting his egress from the building by means of the window in the adjacent tapestry-chamber.

Lady Saxondale, extinguishing the light, regained her own chamber without being observed by any inmate of the castle: and when she was alone, she sat down and gave way to her reflections.

"Can that man be trusted?" she asked herself. "Did he not meditate treachery towards me when agreeing to admit that odious Gunthorpe, and that Deveril—who is alike loved and detested—into the castle? I can scarcely understand the true meaning of the villain's conduct. But no matter. I will write to him no more: nor will I farther place myself in his power. If the hints I have thrown out and the immensity of the reward I have offered, shall tempt him to remove these enemies from my path, so much the better: and if he should ever dare to proclaim that he received the hint from me, who would believe him? No one—But how could it have been that William Deveril was at Gainsborough the other day? Was it to obtain a secret interview with Florina? Ah! and that girl's coolness and reserve towards me! Yes, yes—assuredly she has seen Deveril, and he has done his best to prejudice her against me. But I will defeat all my enemies yet: I will defeat them—and I will triumph!"

But, Oh! at what a price were Lady Saxondale's victories to be won and triumphs to be accomplished? She herself shuddered at the idea.

On the following morning, when the postman from Gainsborough called at Saxondale Castle with letters for some of its inmates, he related to the domestics such particulars of the horrible and mysterious murder which had taken place on the previous night, as were current through the town. Lady Saxondale had not yet descended from her own chamber; and Lucilla, one of her maids, brought her up the intelligence which she had just received from the other servants after the postman had called. Her ladyship, who could not of course admit that she had received the same tidings during the past night, affected to be alike shocked and amazed. She asked for farther particulars. Lucilla went on to inform her that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril had discovered the bodies, and that they were going to be examined as witnesses at the coroner's inquest in the course of the morning. Lady Saxondale inquired if suspicion attached itself to any one: but on this point the maid could give her no explanation.

On descending to the breakfast-parlour, Lady Saxondale found Lady Macdonald, Juliana, and Florina already assembled there. The tidings had reached their ears; and they were unfeignedly shocked and astounded. Lady Saxondale attentively watched Florina's countenance when the name of William Deveril was mentioned; and she saw that the young damsel exhibited signs of considerable emotion. Her ladyship was half inclined, through sheer maliciousness, to throw out a hint that Mr. Gunthorpe and the young artist were themselves suspected of the crime: but this she felt would be too preposterous, as not a word to that effect had been mentioned by the postman or by any of the domestics retailing his intelligence.

"Have you seen Lord Harold this morning?" inquired Lady Saxondale of Florina.

"I have: and I am grieved to say that he is not so well as I had hoped and expected to find him. He has passed a good night—but it has not rendered him the benefit which might have been anticipated."

"Doubtless he feels the bruises more to-day," said Lady Macdonald, "than he even did yesterday. It is always the case; and persons in our sphere of life," she added, using her favourite expression, "are more tender and delicate than the lower orders, who think nothing of common accidents."

"Is your brother acquainted with the horrible tragedy the intelligence of which has just reached us?" asked Lady Saxondale, again addressing herself to Florina.

"I thought it better to tell him of it," she replied. "An invalid is always more or less nervous; and I was fearful that he might feel the shock, if the tidings were too abruptly communicated. For, Oh! there is something truly horrible in the reflection that while we were all seated together in the drawing-room last evening, and Harold was slumbering profoundly in his couch, such a terrific crime was being accomplished within two or three miles of the castle, and we utterly unsuspicious of the occurrence!"

"It is indeed very terrible—very shocking," observed Lady Saxondale. "It quite makes one shudder."

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE INQUEST.

At a public-house on the outskirts of Gainsborough nearest to the point whence the mournful procession had started with the two dead bodies on the preceding night, the coroner's inquest was holden at mid-day. As might be expected, the tragedy had produced the utmost consternation throughout the town and neighbourhood; and the public-house where the corpses had been deposited, was surrounded from an early hour in the morning by a crowd of persons, all anxious to obtain any additional particulars that might transpire.

At twelve o'clock, as above stated, the coroner arrived; and the proceedings were opened in the largest room which the public-house contained. A jury was speedily sworn in; and the various witnesses were kept together in an adjoining apartment, —Mr. Gunthorpe, Deveril, and the peasant being amongst them.

The coroner and jury, having viewed the two bodies,—which were in a third room, and had in the meantime undergone a surgical examination,—commenced the proceedings.

The first witness called, was the landlord of an hotel the town. He deposed that the deceased lady, accompanied by her maid, had arrived at his establishment about three o'clock on the preceding day. They had travelled post from Lincoln; and on the lady's box was the name of Mademoiselle D'Alembert: but she appeared to be an English woman by her speech and accent. She had dined by herself in a private room at bout five o'clock, her maid having previously partaken of refreshments in the servants' room of the hotel. At seven o'clock Mademoiselle D'Alembert had tea; shortly after which she and her servant went out together, Mademoiselle intimating to the landlady that they were going to visit some friends whom she had in Gainsborough, and that they might not be home till eleven o'clock. The landlord had noticed that the maid carried a large brown paper parcel in her hand: but what it contained he did not know, and had not given the matter a thought at the time. From that moment he had not seen the deceased females again.

The peasant was the next witness called in. He stated that at about nine o'clock the lady and her maid approached the cottage where he dwelt with his mother and sister; and as he was standing outside the door at the time, they asked him to be permitted to sit down for a little while, as they had taken a longer walk than they had at first intended, and were tired. They were invited to enter: they sat down; and such refreshments as the cottage afforded, were offered, of which they partook. Soon afterwards two gentlemen came to the cottage, one having been there before some few days previously. The peasant then described how Mr. Deveril saved a woman from drowning on the occasion to which he referred, and how that circumstance had rendered him an inmate of the cottage for a whole night. The peasant, in answer to the coroner, stated that it was perfectly evident that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril were totally unknown to the two females previous to meeting them there, as he gathered from the conversation which passed between them at the time. The lady and her maid took their departure: but no one inside the cottage at the time had any opportunity of perceiving in what direction they proceeded. The two gentlemen waited perhaps ten minutes longer, and gave his (the peasant's) mother five sovereigns on account of the kind treatment one of them had experienced, as previously described, at the cottage. It was perhaps three quarters of an hour afterwards that Mr. Deveril came rushing back with horrified looks, bearing the intelligence that the two females were murdered, and ordering him (the peasant) to proceed at once to Gainsborough and give the alarm.

William Deveril was the next witness called in. He stated that he had arrived with his friend Mr. Gunthorpe at Gainsborough on the previous day, and that in the evening they set out along the bank of the river for the purpose of proceeding to Saxondale Castle. He then described how he and Mr. Gunthorpe had called at the cottage—how they met the two deceased females there—how one of them had introduced herself as Mademoiselle D'Alembert, of the Italian Opera—and how she had likewise mentioned her knowledge of Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton. Here the coroner asked Deveril if there were any reason to suppose that the deceased were on their way to Saxondale Castle: but our hero could not hazard a conjecture on the subject—much less speak with any degree of certainty. He then proceeded to describe how himself and Mr. Gunthorpe, after leaving the cottage, had heard the pistol-shots and the scream. There was an interval of not more than a few moments between the shots; and it was immediately after the first that the cry was heard,—the inference being that on one female being suddenly shot dead, the other had screamed out and the next moment met her death likewise. Then William Deveril detailed how he had sped to the cottage to give the alarm, and had subsequently rejoined Mr. Gunthorpe to keep watch until the authorities should come. It appeared that they both noticed that the parcel which the maid had carried, was missing.

The coroner having heard Deveril's evidence, thought that the jury might dispense with that of Mr. Gunthorpe, as it would merely prove a repetition of the testimony just given.

The magistrate who had proceeded to the spot where the murder was committed, was the next witness called in; and he deposed to the circumstance of being summoned thither, and finding the bodies in the condition in which they were almost immediately afterwards removed to the public-house at Gainsborough. He had subsequently superintended the search which was made about the persons of the deceased, and had seen that their money and their trinkets were all safe about them—so that the murderer or murderers had not rifled the victims of their property, beyond the large parcel which had been proved to be missing.

The head constable of Gainsborough was next examined. He deposed that he had visited the scene of the tragedy with some of his men on the preceding night, and that he had returned thither

immediately after daybreak in the morning. He had narrowly searched all about to discover, if possible, any trace which might afford a clue to the unravelling of the mystery. He had searched for the marks of footsteps farther along the bank than where the murder had been perpetrated: but the torrents of rain which fell during the night, had obliterated all traces of footmarks everywhere round about. He had likewise searched in the adjacent fields for any evidence to prove that the parcel had been opened—if brown paper or string, for instance, had been thrown away: but nothing had transpired to show the track which the murderer or murderers had pursued after committing the crime. He had likewise made inquiries at some of the cottages as to whether any suspicious-looking individuals had been seen lurking about the neighbourhood: but he could obtain no positive information upon the subject.

The surgeon gave his evidence last of all. It was to the effect that Mademoiselle d'Alembert had been shot in the head—her servant through the heart. From certain indications, it was evident that the pistol or pistols must have been fired close to them, and that death must have been instantaneous in both cases.

The examination, which lasted three hours, was now concluded so far as the depositions of the witnesses were concerned; and the coroner summed up to the jury. He represented the deed as one of those mysterious tragedies which occasionally occur, without leaving the slightest clue to the diabolical perpetrators. In the present instance it would appear, judging by all the evidence given, that the author or authors of the crime had been disturbed immediately after its perpetration by the ejaculations of alarm sent forth by Mr. Deveril and Mr. Gunthorpe—and that not having time to rifle the victims, the murderer or murderers had snatched up the parcel and fled precipitately with it. The coroner went very carefully through all the evidence; and one portion of his summing up was too remarkable, for several reasons, not to be recorded here:—

"I can conceive, gentlemen, no position more unpleasant for any persons to be placed in, than that of Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr Deveril in the present instance. It is too frequently the case that thoughtless individuals, and those who are in the habit of arriving at rash and hasty conclusions, greedily seize upon the slightest circumstances which seem to be suspicious, and thus do at once affix the taint of suspicion upon innocent persons. I feel it to be my duty to make these remarks upon the present occasion, inasmuch as the discoverers of a crime may not incur the risk of being identified with the criminals. In the present case we have two gentlemen who, so far from being in needy circumstances, bounteously reward a poor peasant family for hospitalities and services previously vouchsafed. Accident brings them for the moment in contact with those persons whom they are destined shortly afterwards to find stretched lifeless upon the ground. But it is clear that these gentlemen and those victims were previously unacquainted with each other, and that an invitation was given by the lady to one of these gentlemen to visit her in London—which he however civilly declined. When these gentlemen discover the bodies, nothing is plundered from them except a parcel which by its size and description probably contained some dress or articles of clothing. The gentlemen moreover give a prompt alarm, render all possible assistance, and voluntarily come forward to tender their evidence at this inquest. One of these gentlemen recently saved the life of a female in that very river on the bank of which the present tragedy took place—thus exhibiting a magnanimity and generosity of conduct deserving all our admiration. Gentlemen of the jury, I hope that you will not consider these remarks to be misplaced, as it might have happened to any two of us here to have been on that spot and at that hour last night to make the fearful discovery which was made by those two gentlemen."

When the coroner had concluded his address, the jury deliberated but for a few minutes, and came to a verdict of "Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown."

Thus terminated the proceedings of the coroner's inquest. Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril returned to the hotel at which they were staying; and there they deliberated together what course they should now pursue. The old gentleman at first proposed that being in the neighbourhood, he should pay one more visit to Lady Saxondale, in the hope of being able to induce her to do justice to William Deveril, in respect to the calumnies she had propagated against him; for he thought that he might frighten her into this course by revealing the fact of the discovery that she was in correspondence with such a person as Mr. Chiffin. But upon mature reflection, Mr. Gunthorpe concluded that Lady Saxondale was a woman of such strong effrontery and brazen hardihood, as not to be intimidated by such means—and that she would indignantly deny the circumstance of the alleged communication with Mr. Chiffin. He therefore resolved to return to London with Deveril, and take time to settle the course which was now to be adopted towards her ladyship.

"But Florina?" suggested William, when his old friend had thus imparted his decision. "Will you leave her in the odious atmosphere of Lady Saxondale's iniquity? Oh, my dear sir! if you do indeed possess any influence in that quarter——"

"Enough, William!" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "I can take no step until I return to London. It must be from thence that I shall write to Lady Macdonald: but I faithfully promise you, William, that within a very few days Florina and her aunt shall cease to be inmates of Saxondale Castle. Will that suffice?"

"It will—it must," answered Deveril. "I submit to your opinion and judgment in all things. But when, sir, do you propose to depart?"

"We will go across to Lincoln presently, after dinner," responded Mr. Gunthorpe; "and to-morrow morning we will start by rail for London. Ah! you rogue, you wish to have an opportunity of seeing Florina for a few minutes?—but it cannot be on the present occasion, William. I have many things requiring my presence in London."

Mr. Gunthorpe had indeed fathomed our hero's desire: for was it not natural that he should wish to see his well-beloved Florina, if only for a few minutes? and would he not cheerfully have walked across to the grounds of Saxondale Castle in that hope? But he was compelled to bow to Mr. Gun-

thorpe's decision; and he did so with the best possible grace.

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Mr. Hawkshaw, having called at Saxondale Castle in the morning, to inquire after Lord Harold Staunton's health, had intimated his intention of riding across to Gainsborough to learn the fullest particulars of the terrible tragedy of the previous night. He was present throughout a greater portion of the examination before the coroner; and when the inquest was over, he rode back to Saxondale Castle to communicate all he had learnt. It was close upon the dinner hour when he reached the baronial mansion; and he was of course invited to stay—an invitation which he did not refuse, as the reader scarcely requires to be informed.

"It would appear," he said, when reciting the particulars of the inquest to the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, "that Mr. Gunthorpe and Mr. Deveril were on their way last night to the castle, when they discovered the murder."

"It may be so," observed Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up haughtily: "but they assuredly would not have been received by me."

Florina, who had started at Mr. Hawkshaw's announcement, now flung a quick glance of indignation at Lady Saxondale as she thus spoke—a glance which her ladyship, however, affected not to perceive.

"I must confess," proceeded Mr. Hawkshaw, who could not understand why Lady Saxondale had spoken in such a manner of Mr. Gunthorpe and our hero—for the rumours and scandals of London life had not reached his ears in Lincolnshire, "that I was exceedingly prepossessed in favour of that Mr. Deveril. He gave his evidence in such a plain straightforward manly style—he is such a handsome youth too—and the coroner paid him the highest compliments."

Had Mr. Hawkshaw been looking at Florina at the time he thus spoke, he would have observed that her looks were fixed upon him with an expression of gratitude which she herself could not at the moment possibly subdue. Oh! how she longed to start up and accuse Lady Saxondale of all the vile perfidy of which she had been guilty: but she dared not. Deveril's earnest injunctions to the contrary restrained her.

At this crisis a footman entered to announce that dinner was served up; and the party accordingly descended to the dining-room. After the banquet, Mr. Hawkshaw and Juliana walked out together as usual in the garden; and the moment they were alone, the Squire said, "Pray tell me, Miss Farefield, was I indiscreet in mentioning the name of Mr. Deveril before your mother? I think that I was—I fear so."

"To tell you the truth," replied Juliana, "that same Mr. Deveril has fallen into sad disgrace with my mother: inasmuch as presuming on certain kindness which she showed him, he fancied that she was enamoured of him—and he was arrogant enough ——But you understand me—I need say no more."

"Ah! I regret that I should have alluded to him in the eulogistic terms that I did," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "But I will be more guarded in future. It only shows how one may be deceived in a person. I could have sworn that this William Deveril was one of the finest young fellows in heart as well as in person, I had ever seen in my life; and certainly if I could have got near him through the crowded room, when he had given his testimony, I should have shaken hands with him. But, Ah! here is another arrival at the castle! What a number of visitors her ladyship receives!"

This remark was elicited by the sounds of a carriage rolling up to the entrance of the castle: but Juliana, indifferent as to who the arrival might be, —and thinking only of rivetting the chains of her fascinations still more strongly than ever around Mr. Hawkshaw's heart,—turned the conversation away from its previous topic, and skilfully began touching on those themes connected with the sports of the field which were so dear to the Squire.

Meanwhile, who was it that had just arrived at the castle? We shall see. But first let us observe that when the post-chaise—for such it was—drove up to the gate, Lady Saxondale was alone in the library, writing some letters. A domestic entered; and handing a card upon a massive silv r salver, said, "This gentleman requests to see your ladyship."

The mistress of the mansion took the card—glanced at it—and read the name of Dr. Ferney.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE PHYSICIAN AND THE LADY.

For some few weeks past, misfortunes and threatening calamities had seemed to strike Lady Saxondale blow after blow: but as each fresh source of inquietude manifested itself, she had assumed new courage to encounter it. Before any of these menacing casualties first transpired, had it been suddenly foretold to her that so many perils were to rise up in rapid succession before her throughout a coming period of but a few weeks, she would have shrunk appalled from the idea of meeting them—she would have felt that they must prove overwhelming. But she had encountered them nevertheless: she had seen gulf after gulf yawn at her feet—and in the endeavour to stop up one she had with her own hands digged others round about her. All these sources of terror and apprehension had been great; but even as they had multiplied in her path, she had still boldly and resolutely pursued her way—quailing sometimes for a moment, it is true—but plucking up her spirit again, and nerving herself with fresh resolution to encounter all obstacles and grapple with all dangers.

Such, up to this point, had been the history of the past few weeks with Lady Saxondale. But now a peril which she had least anticipated—which she had flattered herself to be most remote of all dangers that she stood even the shadow of a chance of encountering,—this one had suddenly presented itself before her! For she trembled to the very nethermost confines of her being at the bare thought of being known as Lady Saxondale to Dr. Ferney, —he who hitherto for long, long years, had only known her as plain and simple Mrs. Smith.

Was it any wonder, therefore, if the card dropped from her hand as she took it off the silver salver and caught the name of Dr. Ferney? It did drop, as

if from palsied fingers: for the stupor of dismay seized all in a moment upon Lady Saxondale. Yes—it seized upon her in a moment: but its paralyzing effect lasted only for that moment. She recovered her presence of mind as quickly as she had lost it: that is to say, she had recovered it sufficiently to stoop down and pick up the card—a movement which she accomplished so rapidly that it even anticipated that of the servant who likewise stooped to pick it up. The outward and visible evidences of Lady Saxondale's emotions were so transitory—passing in a swift brief instant—that the domestic did not notice them, but thought that it was through a pure accident the card had been thus dropped.

"Show Dr. Ferney into this room," said Lady Saxondale: and though it cost her an almost superhuman effort to speak with a forced calmness, it nevertheless struck her that her voice was hollow and sepulchral—at least it sounded so unto her own ears.

The domestic bowed and withdrew; and the instant he had quitted the library, Lady Saxondale pressed her right hand to her throbbing brows, murmuring, "My God, my God! what will happen next?"

A thunderbolt falling upon her head at that instant would have been mercy: for the wildest, most agonizing terrors were agitating in her brain, as she thought to herself that there was but *one* possible object for which Dr. Ferney could visit her—an object which menaced her with utter annihilation! Suddenly however a brightening, cheering thought flashed in unto her mind. Dr. Ferney loved her—had loved her for many long, long years—was devoted to that mysterious interest of her's which for the instant she had deemed so imperilled; and he would not betray her—no, she felt assured that he would not! At a glance, too, of her mental vision, she reviewed the circumstances of their recent meeting—and how he had solemnly proclaimed his readiness to lay down his life for her rather than breathe a word that should hurt her. She reflected likewise on the amiability of his disposition—the generosity of his nature: and she thought also of the immense power of her own charms—her own fascinations. By the time therefore that the door opened again, Lady Saxondale was herself once more—strong-minded, bold, courageous, resolute—prepared for any emergency. But she remained seated at the table with her back towards the opening door, that a too sudden discovery of her identity on the part of the physician should not elicit from him an ejaculation that would excite the astonishment of the domestic. Nevertheless, Lady Saxondale felt more than half persuaded that the precaution was unnecessary: for must he not have already discovered that Mrs. Smith and Lady Saxondale were one and the same? and was it not on account of this discovery that he had come to visit her now?

"Dr. Ferney," exclaimed the domestic, announcing the physician in the usual way: and then the door of the library closed again.

Lady Saxondale rose from the table: but the instant that Dr. Ferney caught a glimpse of her countenance, he did give vent to an ejaculation of wonder and amazement—and he staggered back as if stricken a fierce blow by the hand of an invisible giant.

"Yes, Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, extending her hand with the most gracious affability towards him: "it is I—and now the mystery is cleared up: Mrs. Smith exists for *you* no longer!"

"Is it possible? is it possible?" murmured the doctor, with confusion in his brain: and he took the proffered hand in a mechanical, unconscious manner.

"My dear friend, pray be seated," said her ladyship. "Come, place yourself on this sofa: and I will sit down by your side. What has procured me the pleasure of your visit?"

"And *you* are Lady Saxondale?" he said, still gazing with a sort of vacant incredulity upon the mistress of the castle: "*you* are Lady Saxondale?"

"And most welcome are you at Saxondale Castle! But do tell me, my dear Dr. Ferney, what has brought you hither? Is there anything amiss? Why do you still gaze upon me in this manner? You really begin to frighten me. Are you not towards me the same kind and devoted friend I have ever thought you?"

"Yes—God grant that I may be enabled to continue so!" was the physician's solemn response: and now he appeared to be recovering somewhat of his wonted self-possession.

"You will hasten to tell me, then, what has brought you hither?" said her ladyship; "for it is evident enough that in seeking Lady Saxondale, you did *not* expect to meet the Mrs. Smith of other times. Therefore I suppose your visit has nothing to do with the circumstances which first rendered us acquainted?"

"No—nothing, nothing," rejoined the doctor; and his answer afforded unspeakable relief to Lady Saxondale. "I have come upon quite another business—but a most unpleasant one: and to tell your ladyship the truth, I know not how to break it to you. Yet why should I not? Doubtless you will be enabled to explain it. God grant that you will be so!"

"Pray tell me, my dear friend, what all this means? You are rendering me exceedingly uneasy."

"Listen then," resumed the doctor, "while I explain myself. You know, Lady Saxondale, the passionate devotion I have ever entertained for all those pursuits which are connected with the mysteries of my profession—and that amongst them, that of anatomical research has not been the least. For many years past, I have however practised this branch but little. Excuse me for touching upon such topics: but it is necessary. The other night a dead body was brought to my house: for occasionally I *do* return to that pursuit which was once the most favourite of all. Well, then, Lady Saxondale—a body was brought to my house: it was the corpse of a female—an elderly one; and the moment I beheld it, I was smitten with a suspicion that the deceased had not come fairly by her death. It bore the external evidences of poison—but not of any common poison—a poison of a very subtle and peculiar nature, the evidences of which could only be known to the experienced eye. And my suspicion proved correct: for anatomical research showed me that this woman had died by that very poison which I myself had succeeded in eliminating some weeks back, and which I showed to you on the night you visited me at my house!"

Lady Saxondale had listened in speechless consternation to the physician's words: but it was with a consternation that was felt inwardly rather than shown outwardly—so that he himself observed not the full effects of what he had said.

"Well," he resumed, "you may suppose, Lady Saxondale, that I was horrified on making this discovery—nay, more than horrified—I was bewildered and dismayed. To no human being had I ever given the smallest phial of that poison. I never eliminated it but twice. On the first occasion, the bottle which contained it was broken along with several others, as you must remember, on that night when you visited me in Conduit Street."

"I do remember. It was through my carelessness or awkwardness," said Lady Saxondale; "and you know how sorry I was. But pray proceed."

"On the second occasion when I eliminated the poison, I put my own seal upon the cork of the bottle—and I locked it up in a drawer in my laboratory. That bottle is still there: the cork has not been tampered with—the seal has never been broken. And yet, as sure as I am speaking to you now, that woman died of the very poison which I discovered! That it could have been obtained elsewhere, was impossible. I am too intimately acquainted with all the fruits of chemical research to admit the supposition for a moment, that any other experimentalist has succeeded in eliminating this poison, which is far more powerful than Prussic acid. You may conceive, therefore, how bewildered—how perplexed—how dismayed I was!"

"Naturally so, my dear Dr. Ferney," observed Lady Saxondale, who was herself far more dismayed than ever the physician could have been, although she concealed the outward expression of her terror with a wonderful dissimulation of a mere ordinary interest in what he was reciting.

"I at once repaired," resumed the doctor, "to the person who had procured for me the corpse. From him I obtained the name which was on the coffin of the stolen body. Again I must ask you to forgive me the necessity of touching upon details so indelicate—so nauseating to yourself——"

"Make no apology, doctor," said Lady Saxondale, with every appearance of the utmost affability; "but continue your strange and exciting narrative."

"Provided with the name of the woman," continued the physician, "I, on the following day, when having an hour's leisure, instituted the requisite inquiries at the parochial Registrar's office, and discovered that this woman, Mabel Stewart, died at Saxondale House. I then searched a file of newspapers, and found that an inquest had sat upon the body, and that the verdict attributed her death to apoplexy. Now, Lady Saxondale," added the doctor, "there is something horribly and fearfully mysterious in the death of that woman!"

"You astonish me, my dear Dr. Ferney!" cried her ladyship, who had no need to affect dismay: for she had only to suffer the real consternation she had felt, to appear from behind the mask of dissimulation. "Could the unhappy woman have committed suicide?"

"If so, the phial containing the poison must have been found by her side," responded the physician: "but the evidence given on the inquest, clearly proved that no such discovery took place. Death must have been too instantaneous to allow her even a moment's respite to conceal the phial. So soon as one drop—one single drop of that colourless fluid, touched her throat, life was extinct. It is clear beyond the possibility of doubt—too horribly clear indeed—that Mabel Stewart was murdered!"

"Murdered!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale: "and beneath my roof!"

"It was even so," rejoined the doctor in a mournful voice. "But how could the poison have been obtained? Ah, God forgive me if I wrong you, as I am sure I must: but a frightful suspicion arose in my mind——Indeed, it was the only possible means of accounting for an incident which would otherwise be utterly inexplicable——"

"Name that suspicion: what was it, Dr. Ferney?"—and for the second time on the evening of which we are speaking, did Lady Saxondale's voice sound hollow and sepulchral to her own ears.

"I dare not name that suspicion," murmured the physician. "My God! when I look at you, how can I possibly name it?"

"But you *must*, doctor: for I see that there is something to explain away."

"Until this night—as you are aware—I knew not that Mrs. Smith and Lady Saxondale were identical," continued the physician, in a slow and hesitating manner. "But I feared that she who I believed to be Mrs. Smith had taken the phial from my laboratory on that night when she visited me; and that she had carelessly or thoughtlessly communicated the nature of the poison to some one else at Saxondale House—and hence the catastrophe. Therefore, now that I find Mrs. Smith identified with Lady Saxondale, you can full well understand with what diffidence it is that I am compelled to repeat my suspicion to your face—that your ladyship took away that bottle of poison with you on that particular night!"

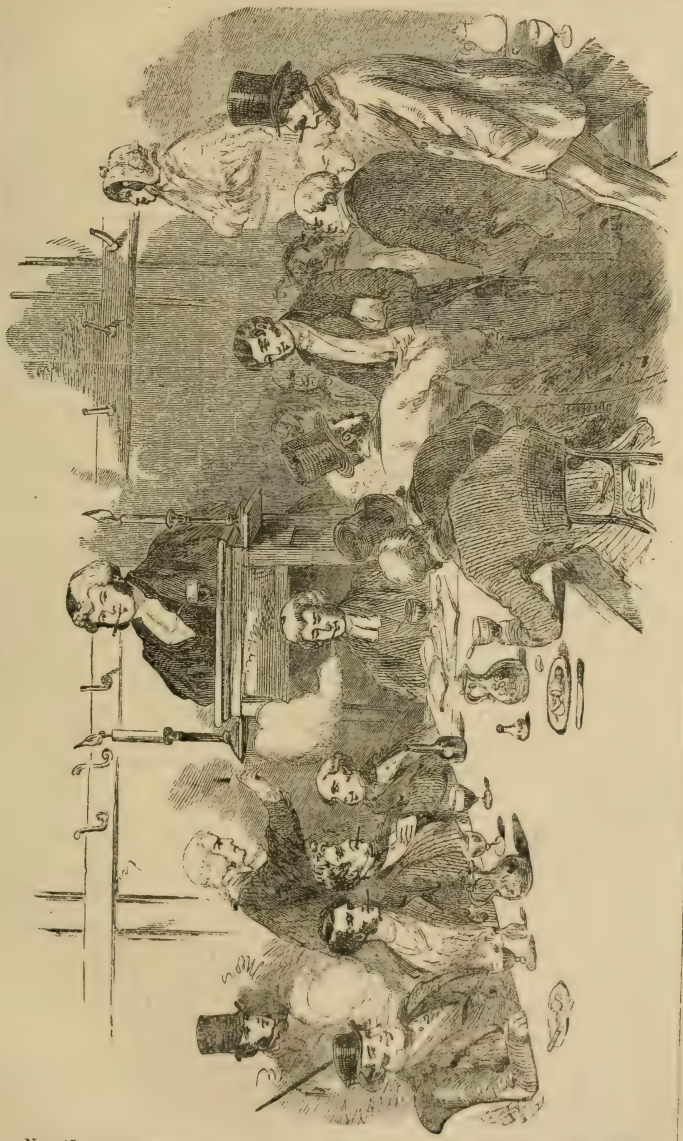
"Dr. Ferney, can you believe me capable of having used the venom for a murderous purpose?"—and Lady Saxondale spoke in a voice of mild and melancholy rebuke: for she knew the physician's character too well to assume indignation with him.

"Oh, tell me that you took the phial," he said, with far greater excitement than it was his wont to display; "and that it must have fallen into villanous and unscrupulous hands! Tell me this—tell me anything that will still enable me to contemplate you on that high pedestal which you have ever occupied in my mind!"

"Well, then, my dear Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, taking his hand, and looking in an appealing manner up into his countenance, "I must plead guilty to that little act which you have named. I will not stigmatize myself with the commission of a theft—because in respect to a friend such as you, it cannot be regarded in that light: but it was through curiosity that I took it. You know how deeply interested I felt in your discoveries——"

"Ah! but now that I bethink me," interupted Dr. Ferney, "I cannot feel otherwise than deeply, deeply grieved to hear that you *did* take that phial. The deed was not well," he continued in a tone of exceeding mournfulness and with corresponding looks. "It almost makes me regret, Lady Saxondale, that I lent myself to that transaction which nineteen years ago——"

"For God's sake," murmured the unhappy



woman, clasping her hands appealingly, and casting her shuddering looks around, "do not allude to it. The very walls have ears. Oh, my dear Dr. Ferney! did you not assure me but a short time back, at your house, that my secret was sacred - that it was my own mystery, into which you would never seek to penetrate? I beseech and implore that you will not fly from your word!"

"But what am I to do in this present case? Let us think no more of the past for the moment. Here, Lady Saxondale, has a foul murder come to my knowledge. It is a murder perpetrated by means of a venom which I myself discovered; and I also am made the discoverer of the awful tragedy it has produced. The finger of God is in all this: it is heaven itself which is prompting me on to bring to justice the perpetrator of that crime! What then, I ask, am I to do? This crime was committed under your roof. God forbid that I should attribute it to you! No—it were impossible! If you then be guiltless, will you not aid me in fixing upon the guilty one?"

"Oh, but all this is most dreadful!" murmured Lady Saxondale, still with clasped hands—still with appealing looks—still with ineffable anguish in every lineament of her pale countenance. "If an exposure be made, must I not confess that I purloined the phial of poison from your house? What will be thought of me? I shall be ruined! A lady who visits a single man stealthily—who is admitted by him into all the mysteries of his laboratory——Ah, Dr. Ferney have mercy upon me—I beseech you to have mercy upon me!—or else take a dagger and plunge it into this bosom!"

Lady Saxondale did not throw herself upon her knees as she thus spoke: but her anguish was truly unfeigned—her inquietude was too great not to render her affliction genuine. As she sat by the physician's side upon the sofa, she leant towards him with an agony of appeal in her looks, her attitude, and her gestures; and as she gave utterance to the closing words of her well nigh frenzied speech, she pressed her hands convulsively to that bosom for which she invoked the dagger as an alternative rather than an exposure.

"Oh, my God! what am I to do?" murmured the physician: and half-averting his countenance, he raised one hand to his pale forehead. "What am I to do?"

"What are you to do?" cried Lady Saxondale. "Bury the subject in oblivion!"

"I cannot—I dare not," responded Ferney, shaking his head solemnly, but with a look of the deepest affliction. "If I conceal my knowledge of this crime, I become as it were an accessory to it: and how shall I ever satisfy my own conscience? But tell me, Lady Saxondale, do your suspicions fall upon any one in your household? Reflect—consider—to whom did you ever impart the secret of that subtle poison? You *must* have spoken of it to some one: tell me who it was! For the voice of that murdered woman cries up to heaven for vengeance; and heaven itself has marked me as its instrument in bringing the murderer to justice. Nay, more—does it not almost seem as if there were retribution in all this?—as if I had penetrated too deeply into the mysteries of nature—had dragged forth unholy secrets—had tasted of the forbidden tree of knowledge—and am now to be punished for my fault? For think you not, Lady Saxondale, that it will be a cruel ordeal for me to proclaim all this to the knowledge of justice and involve *your* name in the transaction?"

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, now suddenly recalling to mind her predetermination to assert her empire over him through the medium of that love of which she knew herself to be the object,—"I believe you once entertained something like a feeling of friendship towards me — perhaps more than friendship——"

"Yes, yes: it was more—it *is* more!" interrupted the physician; "for the sentiment is deathless! Need I tell you that from the first moment I beheld you at my mother's house nineteen years ago, your image has never been absent from my mind? You know it—you know it. I gave you that assurance the other day, when you visited my house: and it is the truth—as I repeat it again this evening! But there is a duty, Lady Saxondale, which I have to perform; and though my own heart should break in accomplishing that duty—though it should crush me down with sorrow into the dust to drag your name before the tribunals of the country—yet what alternative have I? Alas! that duty must be performed! Tell me therefore—on whom must our suspicions settle themselves?"

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, "do not tell me that you ever entertained the slightest love for me. No, no—it is impossible—you could not! If you had, you would not torment me thus now. Good God! do you not comprehend the immensity of the evil you will work?"

"I see but two things which can tell against you," answered the doctor. "The first is that you visited my house. Surely the purity of your own life, and my unsullied reputation, will combine to disarm scandal in that respect? And after all, may not a lady visit a physician? Then, as for your taking the phial—the deed can be well explained as arising from the curiosity of the moment. It is not a watch—nor a purse—nor a jewel—nor anything valuable; and Lady Saxondale need not fear the positive imputation of dishonesty on that account."

"Nevertheless, I conjure you, my dear Dr. Ferney, not to urge this matter. Yes—I entreat, I implore you," continued Lady Saxondale, in accents of the most earnest pleading, "not to bring it before the world!"

"Oh! what would you have me think?" exclaimed the physician, suddenly fastening looks of mingled horror and uncertainty upon Lady Saxondale. "No, no—suffer not such a terrible suspicion to remain in my mind. For your own sake, therefore, lose not a moment in furnishing the clue to the unravelment of this mystery."

"But that suspicion which has struck you," said her ladyship, aghast and trembling.

"It is a hideous one—and every moment does it become stronger," rejoined Ferney. "Indeed, there is an excitement in my mind such as for years I have not experienced. Would to heaven that all this had not occurred."

"Dr. Ferney," said her ladyship, in tones that were now really hollow and sepulchral—not to her own ear alone, but to that of the physician,—"you are dragging me on to a revelation which I shudder to contemplate."

"Oh! then my suspicion is confirmed," mur-

mured the medical man; in accents that were low, deep, and full of horror.

"If you have ever loved me, Dr. Ferney," said the wretched Lady Saxondale, sinking upon her knees before him, "could you find it in your heart to send me to the scaffold?"

There was a burst of anguish from Dr. Ferney's lips: and starting from his seat, he began pacing the room to and fro in terrible agitation. Lady Saxondale, whom he had left kneeling at the sofa whence he had risen, slowly raised herself from that suppliant posture; and advancing towards him, extended her arms, murmuring in half smothered accents, "Mercy, mercy!"

The doctor stopped short. He gazed upon that woman whom he had loved so long—so truly—so enduringly: his thoughts were reflected back to those by-gone years when he had first seen her in the bloom of her youthful beauty; and as he beheld her now in the glory of her splendid womanhood, all the freshness of the passion which had been inspired *then*, was resuscitated now. Yet shuddered he not as he reflected that this woman—the object of his love—was a murderess? Recoiled he not from the presence of her upon whose soul lay the weight of so tremendous a crime? He had felt shocked: but the sentiment of horror was absorbed in the profundity of that strange romantic passion which his heart cherished towards her. It was a passion stronger than himself—a passion which had no hope and no aim—which subsisted not upon expectation—but was in itself eternal, deathless, immortal. Yes, it was a love such as the human heart has seldom known—perhaps never knew before!

With intense anxiety did Lady Saxondale watch the features of the physician as they stood face to face in the middle of the room. Her experienced eye showed her that he was melting in her favour; and her heart bounded with a feeling of relief and the certainty of triumph.

"There must have been some terrible circumstances, Lady Saxondale," he said, at length breaking silence, and speaking slowly, "to have led you on to such a deed as that!"

"Yes—terrible circumstances," was the quick response: "but do not force me to give utterance to them!"

"One word!" ejaculated the doctor, as a thought suddenly struck him. "When you were at my mother's house, you had a servant with you whom you called Mary. Was she this same one whose real name appears to have been Mabel?"

"The same," responded Lady Saxondale.

"I begin to understand. She doubtless threatened some exposure with regard to that mystery the purpose of which I have sworn never to penetrate? And therein I will keep my word!"

"You have conjectured the whole truth," was Lady Saxondale's reply. "And now, my dear Dr. Ferney, may I still regard you as my warmest, my best friend?—may I look upon you as my saviour? Oh! do not, do not hesitate to give me this assurance."

"Lady Saxondale," answered the physician, solemnly, "I fear that for you I am perilling my immortal soul!"

"What proof can I give you of my gratitude? Oh! tell me what proof?"

"There is nothing—nothing," replied the doctor, in a grave and mournful voice. "I could not do you an injury—no, I could not! I feel that I must risk everything and dare everything, alike here and hereafter, sooner than involve you in peril. But, Oh! Lady Saxondale, for heaven's sake take warning by what has passed!"

"I will, I will!" she exclaimed: "your advice shall not be lost upon me. Oh, Dr. Ferney, I am entirely in your hands—I am at your mercy,—I am in your power. May I rely upon your solemn sacred promise not to betray me?"

"You may," was his answer.

"But if a period of remorse should seize upon you," resumed Lady Saxondale, still in the hurried voice of excitement,—"if you should think better of this pledge that you have given——"

"Fear not," he interrupted her, gently, but firmly: "from the past you may judge whether I am a man who will fly from his word. No, Lady Saxondale—even upon my death-bed will I keep your secret: and may heaven forgive me for so doing!"

"The gratitude of my life is your's. And now that we may turn away from this sad, sad, topic," continued Lady Saxondale, "will you not accept the hospitality of the castle? Believe me, my dear Dr. Ferney, I could receive no more welcome guest than one who has proved himself so kind a friend to me."

"No, Lady Saxondale," he answered, not coldly nor distantly—but mournfully and gravely: "I must not remain here. The less we see of each other in the world, the better. You would feel embarrassed in my presence, knowing that I possessed this secret of your's. And I——but no matter. Farewell."

And with this abrupt adieu, Dr. Ferney grasped Lady Saxondale's hand for a moment, and hurried from the room.

Thus terminated this strange scene; and a few minutes afterwards, the physician was being borne away in the post-chaise from Saxondale Castle.

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE JUDGE AND JURY SOCIETY.

On the same evening when the scene above described took place at the castle in Lincolnshire, Lord Saxondale was dining by himself at the mansion in Park Lane. He felt lonely, dull, and dispirited. He had broken with the friend whom he liked best of all his acquaintances—indeed, the only one with whom he had ever been exceedingly intimate: for notwithstanding his rank, his position, and his wealth, there were very few young men in his own sphere, who had chosen to associate much with him. It was not that his pride was too overweening—that his bearing was too arrogant—or his manners too supercilious: but because he was altogether considered a disagreeable and uncompanionable young man. So far as his arrogance, his vanity, his conceit, and his insufferable pride were concerned, there were many young scions of the Aristocracy who possessed all those faults: indeed few were without them: but then they had some redeeming qualities—or at least some which met each other's approval; whereas Edmund Saxondale had none of these. He was generally looked upon as a miserable coxcomb—

without courage to back up the pride which he assumed. On two or three occasions, when in the society of young men, he had put up with insults which every one else would have indignantly resented: and thus he had drawn down upon himself the contempt of those who would otherwise have gladly sought his society for his rank and his money. An allusion has been made in a recent chapter to the last insult of the kind which he had received without seeking what in fashionable life is termed "satisfaction:" and as this was the most flagrant instance that had occurred in respect to him, he had become more talked about than ever as a downright coward. On the day after his breach with Emily Archer and Lord Harold Staunton he had visited a billiard-room in Bond Street, where he found himself, if not exactly cut, at least treated with such marked coldness by the gentlemen present that not even his vanity could blind his eyes to the circumstance; and he had speedily left the place in bitterest mortification.

We now find him, as stated at the commencement of this chapter, dining alone at Saxondale House. He had written in the morning to two or three acquaintances to invite them to dinner: but from each he had received a letter of refusal, couched in terms coldly courteous, and without alleging any reason for thus declining. No wonder, therefore, was it that he felt dispirited and discontented. Addicted though he was to wine, he could not enjoy it now. He knew not what to do with himself. This was the third day since his breach with Emily; and he had remained in-doors almost entirely since the little demonstration at the billiard-table. He was horribly *ennuyé;* he knew not what to do with himself. He had no intellectual resources; and even the last three-volume novel issued from some West End publisher's establishment, failed to amuse him. He now missed both Harold Staunton and Emily Archer. He regretted having quarrelled with them. He was ignorant that his late mistress had left London—equally ignorant of the terrible fate which had befallen her; inasmuch as there had not as yet been time for an account of the tragedy to appear in the London newspapers.

As he sat sipping his wine, more from habit than because he really liked it on the present occasion, he said to himself, "I have an uncommon great mind to go and see Emily, and endeavour to make it up with her. What if she was really unfaithful to me? She is only like the rest of them; and I certainly could not find a handsomer mistress. Besides, after all, she was an amusing girl enough; and we got on very well together till that cursed affair took place. I was in a terrible rage at the time: but it was enough to make me so. Yes: I will go and see her; for this is such precious dull work! I shall be glad to make it up with her, even if she had behaved twice as badly."

Having come to this resolution, Lord Saxondale issued forth; and taking a cab from the nearest stand in Oxford Street, he proceeded to Holloway. Not knowing exactly how his visit might terminate, he ordered the cabman to wait for farther instructions. Indeed, he fancied that Emily was not at home, from the circumstance of no lights appearing in the front windows. On knocking at the door, the summons was answered by the cook, who was dressed out in her gayest apparel: for she had the coachman, the groom, and some other friends to sup with her and make merry during her mistress's absence—that mistress who was never to return!

"Is Miss Archer within?" asked Saxondale.

"No, my lord—missus has gone out of town," was the reply.

"Gone out of town," he exclaimed. "When was that?"

"The morning after you was last here, my lord."

"And the maid gone with her?"

The response was in the affirmative.

"And where has she gone to?"

"Well, my lord, to tell your lordship the truth, she has gone down into Lincolnshire; and from what the maid told me, I think to Saxondale Castle."

"With Lord Harold?" demanded Edmund, more and more astonished.

"Oh, no, my lord," replied the cook. "The fact is, there was a terrible row after you left t'other night: for it seems that Lord Harold had got up-stairs quite unbeknown to missus—and she called him all kinds of names; so that he went off in high dudgeon."

"Ah! is this the case!" said the young nobleman; then in a musing tone, he observed, "After all, I was wrong to quarrel with Emily. However, I must think of what's to be done. I shall most likely call here again to-morrow:"—and with this intimation he took his departure.

Re-entering the cab, he ordered the driver to take him back into London; and while rolling along, he said to himself,—"Perhaps Emily fancied that I should cut off into Lincolnshire, and she has gone to look after me. Or perhaps she means to complain to my mother of the treatment she has received at my hands? And yet she would hardly be such a fool as to run on a wild-goose chase, without being previously certain that I had left London: and as to carrying her complaints to my lady-mother, that is most unlike Emily Archer. No, there is something in all this I can't understand. Shall I cut into Lincolnshire after her? or shall I wait until she comes back? I think I had better wait: for we might cross each other. Yes—I will wait."

Having come to this resolve, Lord Saxondale turned his thoughts upon another subject. This was neither more nor less than the important matter of how he was to pass the evening. He revolved in his mind all the various places of amusement,—dismissing them however one after the other, until he suddenly recollected that there was one of which he had heard a great deal—which he and Lord Harold had frequently thought of visiting—but which somehow or another had escaped the honour of their presence.

Thrusting his head out of the window, he said to the cabman, "Drive to the *Garrick's Head* in Bow street."

In due course Lord Saxondale reached the far-famed hostelry; and dismissing the cab, he made his way up into a spacious room, where a numerous company was assembled, and where the Judge and Jury Society held its sittings. One portion of the room was fitted up in miniature imitation of a court of justice. There was the bench, with the little desk for the judge—there was the table for the bar-

risters—there was the witness-box—and there was a particular table set exclusively apart for the accommodation of those acting as jurymen. The door of this room was kept by an usher wearing the official robe, and whose aspect was as grave and serious as befitted the functions he had to fulfil.

At the numerous tables in this apartment, the visitors were seated—discussing cigars, and drinking the liquors suited to their respective means or tastes. Some were indulging in wine—others were paying their respects to the various compounds of which brandy, gin, rum, and whisky severally formed the chief ingredients—while others, again, were slaking their thirst with the excellent malt liquor dispensed at that house. There was a general air of blitheness—a making up of the mind to enter into the enjoyments of the evening—and a pervasive feeling of certainty that these would prove of the richest and raciest description. Lord Saxondale seated himself at a table near the judicial bench, and called for a bottle of champagne—an order which was highly satisfactory to the waiter, and convinced the guests who heard it, that the new-comer was "a cut above the generality of them."

Three or four individuals in gowns, wigs, and white bands, and looking as if they had just arrived from Westminster Hall, now entered the apartment and took their seats at the table appropriated to the barristers. They carried in their hands bundles of papers duly tied round with red tape, and having as completely the air of "briefs" as if their connexion with John Doe and Richard Roe were an actual fact instead of an agreeable fiction. In a most lawyer-like style, too, did these gentlemen who performed the part of barristers, untie the tapes—arrange their papers before them—take great dips of ink with long feathery pens—and make endorsements upon their pseudo-briefs, writing down imaginary fees in real figures.

Presently the usher of the court threw the door wide open, shouting in a stentorian voice, "Silence and hats off, for the Lord Chief Baron!"

These mandates were at once complied with: but there was a general sensation as the object of this ceremony, ascending the stairs, made his appearance, if not as a real judge, at least in the garb and with the gravity of one. This was Mr. Nicholson—the landlord of the tavern, and the presiding genius of the Judge and Jury Society. No ordinary character in his way, is the personage just introduced. He is a man of good intellectual acquirements, of agreeable manners, and of great conversational powers. He has a readiness of wit, a facility of good-natured sarcasm, and a tact in seizing upon any passing incident to render it available for his purposes—which admirably qualify him for the judicial part which he thus enacts. He is a really clever man, and as ready at his pen as with his tongue. In private life he bears the character of a liberality, a generosity, and a kindness of heart, which have often made him lose sight of his own interests in ministering to the wants of others. Lord Chief Baron Nicholson is therefore not only "a capital fellow" in the man-about-town acceptance of the term, but in its most true and literal meaning. In personal appearance he is short and stout—a living evidence of the good qualities of his own larder. Of convivial disposition, his ample countenance beams with a natural *bonhommie* which he cannot possibly subdue even when putting on the gravity of the judge: at all events if he were a real judge, and presided at the Old Bailey, it would need but a single glance at his countenance to convince the culprit brought before him that justice would assuredly be tempered with mercy.

But to return to our narrative: the Lord Chief Baron entered the apartment which we have above described; and with measured steps he ascended to the judicial bench. There he bowed to the bar, and the bar bowed to him: so that if it were not for the evidences of conviviality abounding upon the several tables, the spectators might really have fancied themselves in the presence of all the real ceremony and grave formality of a court of justice.

Having deposited himself upon the bench, the Lord Chief Baron exclaimed, "Waiter!"

"Yes, my lord," replied one of his own tavern-functionaries.

"A glass of brandy-and-water and a cigar," said the great legal luminary:—and thereupon a general laugh ensued throughout the room.

When the judicial wants were duly supplied, and the havannah in the judicial lips was emitting its fragrant vapours, the clerk of the court announced the case that was for trial. It was a civil action that was thus to occupy attention; and a number of the guests having been sworn in as jurymen, one of the gentlemen officiating as the barristers opened the proceedings. It is not our purpose to give any description of the subject-matter of the trial; because in a mere narrative form it would lose the greater portion of its interest. But we must observe that the persons officiating as barristers, acquitted themselves with no ordinary degree of talent—delivering speeches which for their easy and continuous flow, might have made the orators the subject of envy on the part of many a stammering, stuttering, thick-pated practitioner at Westminster Hall. Witnesses were examined; and these kept the company in a continual roar of laughter. From time to time the Lord Chief Baron himself seasoned the proceedings with some witty interjections, which added to the general merriment. But the cream of the whole affair was the judicial summing up. Sparkling wit, exquisite humour, sly sarcasm, and a perfect assumption of the air and manner of the real judge, characterised the Lord Chief Baron's part of the performance. There was one incident that told admirably. It happened that the individuals acting as jurymen, drank somewhat more than was good for them; and in plain terms, grew very intoxicated. The Lord Chief Baron addressed them as an intelligent and enlightened body of men—men representing the wisdom of the country—men who indeed for the time being constituted "the country," the matter at issue between the plaintiff and defendant being, in legal parlance, "tried by God and their country." The solemn gravity with which the Lord Chief Baron thus addressed his drunken jury—and the vacant stare as well as the tipsy swaying to and fro with which the said jurymen listened to the great functionary—formed by no means the least ludicrous portion of the comedy.

When we observe that though these proceedings lasted two hours and a half, without for a single moment flagging into dullness or waning into insipidity—and when we add that from first to last the

spectators experienced unfailing amusement—those of our readers who have never visited the Judge and Jury Society, will be enabled to understand how well sustained the spirit and interest of the proceedings must be.*

Lord Saxondale waited until the end, when he adjourned to the supper-room below; and there he invited the Lord Chief Baron, the barristers, the clerk of the court, and the witnesses, to sup with him. The conviviality was kept up until a somewhat late hour; and if it had not been that a couple of waiters conveyed Lord Saxondale into a cab, he never could have reached it of his own accord.

Edmund slept until a late hour on the following day; and when he descended to the breakfast-parlour, it was with a racking headache and an accompanying depression of spirits. The morning newspapers lay upon the table. He took up one; and almost the very first announcement upon which his eyes fell, was that of a horrible and mysterious murder committed in Lincolnshire. He read on: and callous, indifferent, emotionless though he naturally was, it was nevertheless with dismay and horror that he thus learnt the particulars of the frightful tragedy which had occurred on the bank of the Trent. The journal concluded its account by stating that the whole affair was involved in the deepest mystery, suspicion attaching to no known person. And mysterious was it indeed to Edmund Saxondale: nor could he of course form the slightest conjecture as to the author or authors of the crime.

Having hastily dressed himself, he proceeded without delay to Evergreen Villa. The intelligence had already reached the cook, the groom, and the coachman,—the newspaper having likewise been their informant. Consternation and dismay prevailed at the villa; and indeed great was the excitement throughout the neighbourhood, it being known that the mistress of the house and her attendant maid had met with their death under such mysterious circumstances in Lincolnshire. Some relations of the unfortunate Emily Archer, and who dwelt in London, made their appearance at the villa soon after Lord Saxondale's arrival there; and they took possession of the house and all the property it contained. After some little deliberation, it was decided that one of them—an uncle—should proceed without delay into Lincolnshire, and bring up the corpses for the purposes of respectable interment.

Dispirited, and with a gloom sitting heavily upon his soul, Edmund quitted the villa and returned to Saxondale House, his mind filled with the awful tragedy which had taken place under such extraordinary and unaccountable circumstances.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MR. GUNTHORPE'S VISITS.

In the neighbourhood of Stamford Hill was a handsome residence, situated in the midst of spacious grounds, and commanding a beautiful view of all the surrounding scenery. This house, after remaining unoccupied for some time, had within the last three weeks become the abode of Mr. Gunthorpe. The moment he had decided upon taking it, he lost no time in fitting it up in a very handsome manner. Everything this gentleman did might appear to the shallow observer to be done on the impulse of the moment: but it was not so. The key to the reading of his character was this: that he made up his mind quickly, yet not without as much deliberation as the incident of the moment might deserve; and when once he had resolved how to proceed, he lost no time in carrying out his plans. Thus, the very day after he had taken Stamford Manor—as it was called—waggon-loads of the costliest furniture arrived at the place. He did not fit up the house by degrees, nor even take a week to do it: his orders were given at the moment to upholsterers whose warehouses furnished proofs of their competency for the commission; and as money to Mr. Gunthorpe was no object, his will and pleasure were promptly executed.

A few days after his return from Lincolnshire, and at about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, Mr. Gunthorpe entered his carriage, and drove to a pretty little cottage situated at no great distance from the manor. The moment his modest equipage stopped at the door, little Charley Leyden, nicely dressed, and full of joyous spirits, bounded forth to welcome the benefactor of his mother and sister. Henrietta herself was likewise speedily seen upon the threshold to greet Mr. Gunthorpe; and the old gentleman was introduced into a neat little parlour, where Mrs. Leyden, considerably improved in health, received him with a degree of warmth which was due to one who had dragged her forth from the depths of poverty.

"I am come to have half-an-hour's chat with you, Mrs. Leyden," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "respecting a certain matter you spoke to me about some days ago;"—and he glanced slily towards Henrietta, who, blushing deeply, rose to leave the room. "No—you needn't go!" cried the old gentleman. "On the contrary—you are a very necessary person to the present conference. But you, Master Charley, can run out and play in the garden till you are sent for," he added, patting the child kindly upon the cheek.

"Oh! do let me stay," said Charley. "I am so fond of being where you are, I did not much like you at first," he went on to observe with boyish ingenuousness: "but since I knew you better——"

"Hush, Charley—hush!" interrupted Mrs. Leyden, somewhat severely. "You should not speak in this manner."

"My dear madam, let him speak as he will," said Mr. Gunthorpe: "everything he utters comes up from his heart. You are a good little boy, Charley; and here is something to buy a toy with," he added, placing a five shilling piece in his hand.

"But I would rather stay with you than have that, if you mean me to go away," said the child, pouting his pretty lips and looking as if he were going to cry.

"You must run out and play a little by yourself for the present," said Mr. Gunthorpe, kissing him; "and if you do, you shall come and stay a whole day with me at my house."

Charley's countenance now brightened up; and

* At the time of which we are writing (1844) Lord Chief Baron Nicholson illuminated the *Garrick's Head*, with his presence: but at the present period (1852) he shines in undimmed glory at the *Coal Hole* tavern.

he willingly left the room, taking the crown-piece with him.

"Now, my dear girl," said Mr. Gunthorpe, turning to Henrietta, "I am going to devote my attention to your affairs: for you see I have constituted myself your guardian, as it were—and therefore I must attend to your interest. Now, don't blush and look confused, Henrietta: there is nothing to be ashamed of in an honourable love—and nobody will be more delighted than myself to behold these bright prospects realized. I presume, madam," he continued, turning towards Mrs. Leyden, "that you have not as yet been to see this young man who claims to be the heir of the title and estates of Everton?"

"If you remember, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Mrs. Leyden, "you counselled me to take no step in the matter until you had time to look into it yourself."

"True! I recollect! It was the best course to be adopted. But I suppose, young Miss, that you have occasionally visited that cottage which you tell me is so picturesquely situated at no great distance hence?"

"Henrietta has called there three or four times," observed Mrs. Leyden. "I believe that you consented that she should do so?"

"Oh! certainly: I saw no objection," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "That Mrs. Chandos of whom Henrietta spoke, did her a great service in delivering her from Beech-Tree Lodge. And by the bye, I am quite anxious to behold this heroine. But I thought you told me they were going off in such a violent hurry into the country, somewhere down into Wales?—and that is a fortnight ago."

"Yes: but Adolphus—I mean the true Lord Everton," said Henrietta, hesitating and blushing, "has been so very unwell again, that they were compelled to postpone their journey—although it was with great reluctance: for they were most anxious——"

"Yes, naturally so," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe.

"It is Lady Everton in Wales," observed Henrietta, "that they are going to see."

"Yes—naturally so," repeated the old gentleman; and he looked abstracted: but quickly recovering himself, he said, "And now tell me, Henrietta—the more you see of this young man——"

"The more she finds that she likes him," replied Mrs. Leyden, speaking on behalf of her daughter, who again seemed full of confusion.

"Well, that's natural also," cried Mr. Gunthorpe. "But you tell me that he has been ill again?"

"His intellects have completely recovered their healthy tone," responded Henrietta: "but his physical strength is not so fully restored. When the medical man was informed that he meditated this long journey, he forbade it for the present. Enough was told to the physician to make him understand that it was a journey for an object likely to be attended with no ordinary degree of excitement; and therefore he insisted upon Adolphus postponing it for two or three weeks, that he might acquire physical as well as mental strength sufficient for the occasion."

"And he did wisely," said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Mrs. Chandos and her brother are exceedingly kind to him——"

"Her brother?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I do not recollect your having before mentioned this brother. Who is he? what is he? I hope, for his own sake, that your Adolphus has fallen into good hands?"

"Oh, yes! there cannot be the slightest doubt of it!" exclaimed Henrietta. "Mrs. Chandos behaves to him as if she were a sister: and Francis Paton——"

"Eh? what name did you say?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe, with a sort of start, as if he had not caught the words from the young girl's lips.

"Francis Paton," she repeated. "He is quite a youth—not more than eighteen——"

"Ah! And pray what age may his sister, this Mrs. Chandos, be?"

"About twenty-six," answered Henrietta.

"Twenty-six? and her brother eighteen?" said Mr. Gunthorpe, in a musing tone. "What is this Francis Paton? Nothing, I suppose. He is doubtless well off?"

"His sister Mrs. Chandos appears comfortably circumstanced: but her brother Frank," continued Henrietta, "is totally dependent on her. For I believe that he has been a page in the service of Lady Saxondale——"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe: "a page in the service of Lady Saxondale? But however, I shall go and see these persons at once. Don't think, Henrietta, my dear girl," he added, in a kind voice, and stopping short when about to leave the room with a precipitation which he often manifested, and which would have helped to lead persons to suppose that he was of an impulsive character, – "do not think, I say, that I am going to find out objections and raise imaginary obstacles in the way of your happiness. No such thing! I hope most sincerely for *your* sake, that all you have told me will turn out perfectly correct."

"Oh! my dear sir," cried Miss Leyden, "I am incapable of telling you an untruth!"

"I know it," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I did not mean that I was going to inquire whether you had told me the truth—but whether everything is as you have been led to believe it—whether, in short, this young man's lofty notions are real and not visionary. I dare say, however, they are real enough: for I myself happen to know something of his uncle—or of him whom he believes to be his uncle, whichever it may be: and what I do know of that man, is not altogether to his credit," added Mr. Gunthorpe, with a degree of bitterness that he was not often wont to display. "Many, many years have elapsed since he and I met. He was plain Mr. Everton then. But perhaps you will be surprised, Henrietta, when I tell you that I have seen your Adolphus—granting him to be the same——"

"You have seen him?" ejaculated Henrietta.

"Yes: but it was in his childhood, many years ago. He was then a beautiful boy, with dark eyes and hair——"

"He has dark eyes and hair!" said Henrietta, with a smile and a blush,—the smile being one of joy, for the innocent maiden thought that the identity was thus completely established between her Adolphus and the one of whom Mr. Gunthorpe was speaking.

"I think," said the old gentleman, in a grave and solemn voice, "that I should recognize his linea-

ments, though more than sixteen years have elapsed since I beheld him—and then he was but twelve years old."

"Sixteen and twelve are twenty-eight—and Adolphus is twenty-eight!" cried Henrietta, with increasing satisfaction.

"Ah, I see that you love him!" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "and no matter whether he be the real Lord Everton or not, if he is a worthy young man——"

"Alas! consider all his sufferings," murmured Henrietta, the tears starting into her eyes. "For sixteen years was he the inmate of a place that to him was a prison. He has seen too little of life to have learnt any of its evil ways."

"That captivity," observed Mr. Gunthorpe, with a deeper gravity than before, "is in itself almost a sufficient proof that he is the real Lord Everton. Oh! what guilt does that man—his uncle—have to answer for! But I must now delay not. Farewell for the present. I shall call again on my way homeward: as I dare say a certain young lady," he added, looking archly at Henrietta, "will be anxious to know the result of my interview."

Thus speaking Mr. Gunthorpe quitted the room; and was hurrying forth to his carriage, when he recollected that he was not exactly acquainted with the whereabouts of the cottage to which he was about to proceed. He therefore returned for the requisite explanation, which Henrietta speedily gave him. He then entered his vehicle, having directed the coachman whither to proceed. The distance was not long; and in a short time the equipage drove up to the front of Lady Bess's picturesque cottage.

We should here remind the reader that Henrietta had not informed either her mother or Mr. Gunthorpe of the *one* incident on that memorable night of her release from Beech-Tree Lodge, which had for the time being filled her bosom with injurious suspicions against Lady Bess, whom she only knew as Mrs. Chandos. Consequently Mr. Gunthorpe was unacquainted with anything to the prejudice of this amazonian heroine. And the reader must likewise recollect that Lady Bess had, by her sophistry, explained away those suspicions from Henrietta's mind, on the first occasion when the young girl called at the cottage.

But to continue our tale. When Mr. Gunthorpe's carriage drove up to the door, Rosa the servant-woman, immediately came forth; and on the old gentleman giving his name, he was at once introduced into the tastefully furnished little parlour: for that name was known at the cottage—and honourably known too, on account of all that Henrietta Leyden had said in connexion with it. Elizabeth Chandos and her brother Francis Paton were alone together in the parlour at the time when Mr. Gunthorpe was thus introduced. They rose to receive him: but they were struck by the singular degree of interest with which he surveyed them. He did not speak a word: his lips moved—it was evident that something unspoken was wavering upon them—but to which he could not give utterance. To their farther surprise, mingled with alarm, he tottered to a seat, and sank upon it, saying, "A glass of water—give me a glass of water I am ill."

There was a decanter on the little sideboard, and Lady Bess, hastening to fill a tumbler, presented it to Mr. Gunthorpe, who merely drank a few drops—and then, speedily recovering, said, "Forgive the trouble I am occasioning: but the heat of the weather is quite overpowering. I felt as if I were about to faint."

"Do you feel better now, sir?" asked Lady Bess in a kind voice. "Is there anything we can do for you? Frank, run and get up some wine——"

"No: do not give yourself the trouble," exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe. "I never touch it in the middle of the day——Besides, I am altogether well now. Where is your guest—Lord Everton I mean——"

"He is in his own room," said Frank. "I will fetch him. He was with us a few minutes back——"

"No: do not call him immediately," said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I wish to say a few words to you two:"—and he again looked first at Lady Bess, then at Francis Paton—then back again at the amazonian lady—with a singular interest in his gaze. "You rendered an immense service to a young girl in whom I am interested," he continued after a pause, taking Lady Bess's hand and pressing it warmly—most warmly—in his own. "Accept my best thanks for what you did upon the occasion. And now give me your hand, Francis Paton," he said: and when he received that hand, he pressed it as kindly and as fervently as he had done the sister's.

Lady Bess and Frank had heard from Henrietta that Mr. Gunthorpe had strange ways about him, but possessed the most generous of hearts; and thus they were by *no* means annoyed at whatsoever eccentricity of conduct he appeared to display on this occasion. They felt that he was a gentleman with whom they could at once find themselves on a friendly and familiar footing; they even experienced sentiments which seemed to draw them towards him, and give them pleasure at the kindness with which he pressed their hands and bent his looks upon them. But then they had heard such excellent accounts of him from Henrietta: and therefore it appeared perfectly natural that they should like, and even love, anybody who was good to that artless young maiden whom they both loved and liked as a sister.

"Now, I dare say you will think me a very strange person," said Mr. Gunthorpe; "but I am sure you will not fancy me an impertinent one, when I ask you a few questions. Be assured it is entirely in your own interest that I shall interrogate you. You, Francis Paton, have been a page at Lady Saxondale's—have you not?"

"I have, sir—and likewise at Court," responded the youth.

"At Court?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! indeed? And pray by whose interest did you obtain that post?"

Frank glanced at his sister to ascertain from her looks what reply he should make; and she at once said for him, "There is every reason to believe, Mr. Gunthorpe, that it was through Lord Petersfield's interest my brother obtained his appointment in the Royal Household: but it is absolutely certain that through that nobleman's recommendation he was introduced into the service of Lady Saxondale."

"Lord Petersfield—eh?" said Mr. Gunthorpe, in a musing tone. "But I suppose you have some prospects—money to receive—or something of that sort—have you not, Frank?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of," was the youth's reply: and now both he and his sister surveyed Mr. Gunthorpe with a feeling of increasing interest—for they could not think that these questions were put without some serious motive.

"Nothing—eh?" he said, with a peculiar and incomprehensible look. "But you, Elizabeth—— You see that I make myself quite at home with you, calling you by your christian names—— However, you must at once regard me as your friend—from all that Henrietta has told me I wish you to look upon me as such. But I was about to ask some question: it was addressed to you, Elizabeth. I suppose you have received a fortune——eh? Come, tell me all about it now?"

Lady Bess blushed deeply; and turning away in confusion, evidently knew not what answer to make.

"Elizabeth," said Mr. Gunthorpe, starting from his chair and taking her hand, "look me in the face, and tell me that as a woman you have never done aught which has conjured up that blush to your cheeks!"

"On my soul, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied Lady Bess, at once speaking with the dignity of maiden purity and feminine virtue in its most real and best sense,—"*as a woman* I have never done aught for which I need blush!"

Mr. Gunthorpe wrung her hand with effusion: and both she and her brother were surprised to observe the tears trickle down his cheeks,—not only surprised, but affected also; for it was singular that this old man—a complete stranger to them—should take such an evident interest in their circumstances, both moral and worldly. But hastily dashing away those tears, Mr. Gunthorpe resumed his seat, and for a few moments remained wrapped up in deep thought.

"Well," he suddenly resumed, turning towards Lady Bess, "about yourself? You had a fortune, I suppose?"

"I received some money," she answered, still with a visible unwillingness to be thus questioned.

"Oh! you received some money?" repeated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Would you mind telling me how much? I can assure you that I ask not from mere curiosity——"

"Then I will tell you, sir," responded Lady Bess. "I received five thousand pounds."

"Five thousand pounds! no more?" said Mr. Gunthorpe "Are you sure? Pray tell me the exact truth, without reserve."

"That is the exact truth," replied Lady Bess, with increasing curiosity and surprise at this interrogatory. "But I should add, in fairness to a certain individual, that I have latterly received a hundred pounds quarterly, through an attorney in London."

"And that individual to whom you allude?" said Mr. Gunthorpe, somewhat eagerly: "pray tell me his name."

"I do not know wherefore I should conceal it," observed the amazonian lady: "for you can have none but a good motive in thus questioning me——"

"Certainly not. On my soul, as a living man," exclaimed Mr. Gunthorpe vehemently, "my motive is a good one. The name of that individual."

"Sir John Marston," rejoined Elizabeth.

"Ah! the villain!" muttered the old gentleman, in a tone of deep execration. "But now another question, my dear Elizabeth—for so you must permit me to call you. You have been married—you are married——your husband——I presume as a matter of course his name is Chandos?"

Lady Bess blushed up to the very hair of her head, and uttered not a word.

"My dear sir," said Francis Paton, approaching Mr. Gunthorpe and bending down towards him, "pardon me for hinting that your words touch upon topics not altogether agreeable to my sister."

"Poor boy—poor girl! I would not willingly or wilfully distress either of you," said the old gentleman, in a tremulous voice that showed he was much moved. "Elizabeth, believe what I say—I would not wantonly cause you pain. You have assured me that as a woman you can look without a blush upon your past life—therefore why not speak of your husband? If he be dead, and you deplore his loss, I can sympathize with you: but if he be alive and separated from you, it can scarcely be from any fault of your own, if your life has been pure and chaste? And that it has been so, I feel convinced: for there is something in your look which corroborates your solemn affirmation."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Gunthorpe—most sacredly can I repeat that assurance!" exclaimed Lady Bess: then as her voice suddenly sank into a lower and graver tone, she said, "My life has had its faults: but that which woman generally commits first, has never tainted my name:"—and she averted her blushing countenance as she spoke.

"My sister has been married, Mr. Gunthorpe," whispered Francis Paton: "but she has never lived with her husband for a single day—no, nor for an hour, nor a minute. She is the same as if the marriage ceremony had never been performed at all."

"This is most remarkable," said the old gentleman, gazing in profoundest surprise upon that handsome creature, of superb shape, who stood with half-averted countenance at a little distance from where he was seated. "But your husband, Elizabeth," he continued,—"pray do not hesitate to speak to me upon this head. What was he? where is he?"

"There is such an earnestness in your words, Mr. Gunthorpe," replied the lady, now bending her magnificent eyes upon him again, "that I cannot help answering your questions. The man whom I married, bore not the name of Chandos:"—then after a few moments' hesitation, she said, "I would tell you what his real name is, but that I should perhaps be doing an injury to a young lady of whom I have heard some good things, and nothing bad."

"Whatever necessity there may be for secrecy and confidence, Elizabeth," observed Mr. Gunthorpe solemnly, "that necessity shall be respected by me. I am a man of honour."

"Oh, you need not give me this assurance!" exclaimed Lady Bess: "your conduct to Henrietta and her mother made me esteem you before I knew you. And now there is something which impels me to give you my confidence and to reply to all your questions. If I chose to assume the title," she added after another brief pause, "I could call myself the Marchioness of Villebelle!"

"Villebelle?" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! I comprehend. He eloped some short time back with the Hon. Miss Constance Farefield, Lady Saxondale's daughter."

"And he has married her," rejoined Lady Bess.

"Married her?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, in astonishment. "But if he were previously married to you?"

"He was," she observed: "but I released him. I never loved him—I cared not for him. I have never known what love is," she added, in a softer and gentler voice. "But if he loved, I could pity him. And he did love. I met him a few weeks ago—after a long, long separation. I had never seen him since the day which united our hands at the altar. How could I consider that mock ceremony binding? It was a marriage and no marriage. Well, sir, we met as I have already told you; and it was a few weeks back. He unbosomed all his secrets to me—and I voluntarily offered to place in his hands whatsoever papers existed in mine as the proofs of our marriage."

"And you did so?" said Mr. Gunthorpe.

"Yes. But I did not choose to meet him again: I therefore gave him an appointment for a particular night and at a particular place. This was at King's Cross; and I despatched to him a messenger with the papers of which I have spoken. He has married Lady Saxondale's younger daughter: they have gone to Madrid—and I hope that they will be happy."

"But this is wonderful as a romance!" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "You are a singular being, Elizabeth. I have not been quite an hour yet in your society, and I have discovered many excellent traits in your character:"—and he spoke with a sincerity and an earnestness that showed how deeply interested he really was in the object of his eulogies.

"Accept my gratitude, dear sir," she answered, "for the kind language you address to me."

"Kind, Elizabeth!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe. "But I must subdue these emotions for the present," he murmured to himself: then after a brief interval of reflection, he said, "There are many, many more questions that I should wish to ask you: but I am fearful of appearing too obtrusive at present. Many mysteries are evidently surrounding you both."

And which, if I mistake not, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Bess, accosting the old gentleman and looking earnestly in his countenance, "methinks that you could clear up if you would. Yes—I am convinced of it!"

At this moment the door of the parlour opened, and the invalid appeared upon the threshold,

"Adolphus!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe the instant he caught sight of the young nobleman's countenance.

"What! you know him?" said Lady Bess, with increased surprise. "What is the meaning of all this? Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe? Pray speak—tell us—keep us not in suspense——"

"I knew Adolphus when he was a boy," said the old gentleman, his voice again becoming tremulous and his looks expressive of deep inward emotion, as he seized the invalid's hand and pressed it warmly.

Adolphus had been naturally surprised at so fervid a greeting from a stranger: but the moment he learnt, by Lady Bess's words, that the old gentleman was Mr. Gunthorpe of whom Henrietta had often spoken, he expressed the most enthusiastic delight at making his acquaintance. Mr. Gunthorpe gazed upon him long and earnestly; and then said in a solemn voice, "Yes: assuredly you are the true and rightful Lord Everton!"

"There cannot be a doubt of it," observed Lady Bess: "we have proofs the most positive. Well did Adolphus recognize the portrait of his mother——"

"The portrait of Lady Everton?" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "Have you it here? If so, permit me to see it."

"It is here," said Elizabeth, unlocking a writing-desk and producing the picture which she had torn from the book at Lord Petersfield's house.

Mr. Gunthorpe took it from her hand, and hastened to the window, where he contemplated that portrait for some minutes. His back was turned towards Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank, during the time that he was thus occupied: but that his gaze was intent, and that he studied the picture earnestly, was evident from the circumstance that his head moved not during those minutes. As he turned away from the window and gave back the portrait to Lady Bess, she observed that there was the mark of a tear-drop upon it: and she felt more convinced than even at first, that Mr. Gunthorpe was in some way or another intimately yet mysteriously connected with the circumstances relating to the past and which the present was rapidly developing.

"My dear young friend," said the old gentleman, addressing himself to Adolphus, "the principal object of my visit here to-day was to speak to you upon a certain delicate matter. I am indeed glad that I came," he continued, flinging a rapid glance upon Elizabeth and Frank: "for I have heard things which I little expected to hear, and which have interested me profoundly. But upon those points we shall touch no more to-day. For the present let me speak to you, Adolphus, relative to your own affairs. Do not regard me as a stranger: I am not one. When you were a boy, I knew you well: but you doubtless recollect me not. I am so much altered!"—and these last words were uttered mournfully.

"My dear sir," whispered Elizabeth Chandos, drawing Mr. Gunthorpe aside, "it pains Adolphus to dwell too long upon the past. If you will, I am perfectly disposed to submit to you all the proofs I have obtained in respect to the atrocious guilt of his uncle, the usurping Lord Everton. Come with me into another room."

Mr. Gunthorpe according followed Lady Bess to the opposite parlour; and when they were alone together, she narrated to him all that she had learnt from the lips of Adolphus relative to the incidents of his earlier years, and how he was carried off from Everton Park in the middle of the night, just before his father, General Lord Everton, was expected home from India. She likewise explained how on that very same night the corpse of another boy of the same age was substituted for the living heir. Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat at this part of the narrative, and paced to and fro in the little apartment in a state of the utmost excitement.

"I knew that Everton," alluding to the uncle, "was a villain," he said: "but still I thought him not capable of such monstrous guilt as this! By heaven, there is no punishment too great for such a miscreant: How is it, Elizabeth, that you have not invoked the aid of justice ere now?"

"Ah! my dear sir," responded Lady Bess, in a tone of deep melancholy, "because there are reasons which induce me to seek the settlement of all this without exposure to the world."

"And those reasons?" asked Mr. Gunthorpe, with a look of anxiety and suspense.

"I fear," replied Elizabeth Chandos, slowly, "that this bad man is acquainted with secrets relative to one whose honour and good name must be spared."

"And that one?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe vehemently.

"Lady Everton—the mother of Adolphus!" rejoined Lady Bess. "But not to Adolphus yet have I revealed what I know or rather suspect——"

"But to me, Elizabeth—to me, I say," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe, with a voice and look of solemn adjuration: "to *me* must you tell every thing! I did not think of entering farther into explanations this day: but what you have been saying renders it necessary. Tell me then, my dear Elizabeth—tell me, I beseech you—what your suspicions are, or what your knowledge is?"

"I will, Mr. Gunthorpe," responded the amazonian lady, deeply impressed with the conviction that he had not merely grave reasons but even some mysterious right thus to question her: then in a low and solemn voice, she added, "My belief is, Mr. Gunthorpe, that Lady Everton is my own mother, and therefore the mother of Frank also!"

Mr. Gunthorpe said nothing: but he looked strangely at Lady Bess. Indeed, shrewd and penetrating though she was, she could not comprehend the nature of that look: but at least she felt assured that it was fraught with a kind interest for her.

"Yes—that indeed is a grave consideration," he

observed after a long pause. "Elizabeth, you are acting most wisely—most prudently: you are acting in a way that does you infinite honour. Yes, my dear Elizabeth—the good name of Lady Everton must be screened—must be protected: and therefore her vile brother-in-law must be dealt cautiously with. You will admit me to your counsels—you will suffer me to advise with you relative to each consecutive step you may take. I see that you are gifted with the soundest sense and the most mature judgment——"

"Be assured, sir," responded the lady, still under the influence of that unaccountable power which Mr. Gunthorpe had in so brief a space of time acquired over her, "I shall be only too happy to have a gentleman of your wisdom and goodness to succour and counsel me."

"And now one more word," said Mr. Gunthorpe, looking her very hard in the face. "You suspect who your mother is: have you likewise found any clue to the name of your father?"

Lady Bess started at this question; and she gazed upon Mr. Gunthorpe with amazement and intense curiosity. How did he know that she was ever ignorant of her father's name? Not a word to that effect had been spoken since he entered the house: not a word to that effect had she ever uttered to Henrietta; not a word to that effect had she ever breathed to a soul who, so far as she could see, might have mentioned it to Mr. Gunthorpe. How then could he know it? Who was he—this Mr. Gunthorpe, that had become so suddenly interested in her affairs, and evidently knew more than she could dream of?

"Ah, I see what is passing in your mind," he said: "but you must not become the questioner now. Perhaps the time will shortly come when I shall have strange things to tell you: but that moment is not now present. Again I ask you, Elizabeth——and I conjure you to respond——have you any idea who is your father?"

"Wait one moment, sir," she said; and immediately left the room.

In less than a minute she returned, bearing a letter which she handed to him, saying, "Read this. It was written to me from Dover, by the Marquis of Villebelle, who met Sir John Marston there."

"Ah! Sir John Marston at Dover?" observed Mr. Gunthorpe, as he opened the letter: then, having hastily scanned its contents, he slowly folded it up again—returned it to Elizabeth—and began to pace to and fro in great agitation.

She watched him without saying a word: for there was something in his looks and his manner which made her feel a species of awe, as if there were sanctity in his emotions—a sanctity upon which she dared not obtrude.

"We have said enough for to-day, Elizabeth," he suddenly exclaimed, stopping short and taking her hand. "There is much more I wish to learn from your lips—the entire history of your past life—the history also of your brother Frank: but it must be postponed. You must think over all that has taken place within the two hours past: you must study to know me better. Then you will have the fullest confidence in me—and you will speak without reserve. I know—I feel that it is too much to expect you to open your heart entirely to me who am a comparative stranger unto you. In a day or two you shall see me again: but take no step in the meantime without making me aware of it. And now one word more ere we leave this room to return into the other. You have no funds—I think you told me—beyond a quarterly allowance of a hundred pounds: and your brother has nothing. You have Adolphus to maintain——In short, doubtless you are not too well off. Give me pen, ink, and paper."

Mr. Gunthorpe spoke these last words with the tone of a man who was accustomed to command, and to be obeyed likewise the instant he commanded. Elizabeth Chandos, still under that mystic and unaccountable influence which gave him an empire over her, placed writing materials before him; and seating himself at the table, he wrote something on a slip of paper.

"There," he said, flinging down the pen and starting up from the chair, "you will accept that as a proof of the cordial friendship I have offered you. Now let us go into the other room:"—and without suffering her to wait and see what he had written upon the paper, he led her forth from the parlour.

They entered the opposite one, where they had left Adolphus and Frank; and Mr. Gunthorpe, at once accosting the former, said, "I now know all that regards you—and you are beyond doubt the rightful Lord Everton. I said so just now. I remember your features. In me shall you find a friend."

Adolphus pressed the old gentleman's hand with grateful fervour, the tears trickling down his cheeks.

"And now," said Mr. Gunthorpe, with an arch smile, "have you no message to send to Henrietta? Ah! that name fills your countenance with animation. Well, my dear Adolphus, the girl is worthy of you—and she has already learnt to love you. God grant that you may be happy! If I do not come again to see you to-morrow, I shall send some kind message by Henrietta, to furnish her with an excuse for calling at the cottage."

With these words, the old gentleman took an affectionate farewell of Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank; and hurrying forth, gave some brief instructions to his coachman. Then, waving his hand to those who stood upon the threshold, he entered the carriage, which immediately drove away.

The three proceeded to the parlour where he had left the slip of paper lying upon the table. It was a cheque upon Mr. Gunthorpe's banker for five thousand pounds. Then more than ever did Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus wonder who Mr. Gunthorpe could be.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

APPREHENSIONS.

Lord Petersfield was seated in his library at about three o'clock in the afternoon, looking over a number of papers connected with his diplomatic avocations of past years, and wondering whether certain overtures which he had recently been making to the Ministers then in power, would result according to his wishes. His desire was to obtain an important embassy, which, according to rumour, would soon be vacant; and he was furbishing up his rusty ideas by the aid of the papers that he was so deeply conning. In the middle of his occupation

a footman entered; and presenting him with a card, said, "This gentleman requests an immediate interview with your lordship."

"Sir John Marston?" said Lord Petersfield, who seldom suffered himself to be surprised out of his diplomatic gravity. "Well, let him walk up;"—and yet he was far from liking this visit.

In a few minutes the Baronet made his appearance. He advanced with outstretched hand: but the nobleman received him somewhat coldly, and eyed him with a certain degree of suspicion.

"Many years have elapsed since you and I met, my lord," said the Baronet, gazing upon him as if to mark the extent to which the ravages of time had gone in respect to the nobleman's person.

"It may be many years, Sir John Marston," said Lord Petersfield, with his habitual diplomatic caution; "but I am not prepared to say how many—indeed I should not like to venture a conjecture without careful consideration——"

"Your lordship appears to receive me somewhat coldly," said the Baronet.

"No—not coldly," rejoined Petersfield; "but I am not as yet assured—that is to say, I have not yet had leisure to make up my mind whether you *are* Sir John Marston or not; and I should not like to come to a hasty conclusion."

"What nonsense is this, Petersfield?" exclaimed Marston, with a movement of impatience: then as he threw himself upon a seat, he said, "Come, throw off this diplomatic cautiousness and reserve of your's: for we have to speak upon important business, I can tell you."

"Well, then," said the diplomatist, "granting that you *are* Sir John Marston—and considering from the corroborative evidence of your printed card, coupled with your own deliberate averment, that you may be so——"

"Why, you know I am!" ejaculated Marston, stamping his foot with another paroxysm of impatience. "What the devil makes you go on in this rigmarole style? Surely a matter of some sixteen years or so has not so changed me that you do not recognize me?"

"Personal appearance is not always a trustworthy credential," remarked Lord Petersfield. "But still, as I was saying——"

"The deuce take what you were saying!" interrupted the Baronet. "I will very soon give you a proof that I am that self-same Sir John Marston—Lady Everton's brother—with whom you and the present Lord Everton did a certain business."

"Enough!" said his lordship, now looking anxiously around: then rising from his seat, he advanced to the door—opened it—looked cautiously out—and satisfying himself that there were no eavesdroppers, closed it again. "Now, Sir John Marston, what business has procured me the honour—I might perhaps say the pleasure of this visit?"

"That very same business to which I have already alluded," responded the Baronet. "Do you know my lord that a certain young lady has discovered a clue——"

"Eh—what?" ejaculated his lordship, now speaking rapidly enough; and his diplomatic countenance, suddenly losing all its gravity, became expressive of the utmost agitation. "Do you mean Elizabeth Paton—or the Marchioness of Villebelle—or whatever she may call herself?"

"I do," replied Sir John: "and if I be not very much mistaken, she at the present moment bears the name of Mrs. Chandos."

"You are right, Sir John—you are right. Lady Saxondale and Marlow both told me the other day that Frank Paton, whom I placed with her ladyship, had found a sister in that woman. But do you know——"

"I know that she is a female highwayman," interrupted the Baronet. "It is a most extraordinary thing that I should be staying at Dover when her adventure at the *Admiral's Head* took place. I heard something of it at the time, but little thought that Mrs. Chandos—the heroine of that adventure—and our Elizabeth Paton were one and the same person. I do not read the local newspaper habitually; and therefore the account, which gave a full description of her personal appearance, escaped my notice. But yesterday I accidentally lighted upon the particular number of the Dover newspaper containing that report; and as I read on, I was struck with the conviction that Elizabeth Paton *is* Mrs. Chandos."

"And you are right," responded Petersfield. "I have been told that she is Frank's sister. But what of it? and what connexion have her misdoings with any clue——"

"Who said that there was a connexion?" interrupted the Baronet. "I tell you that she does possess a clue. You know that Villebelle has married Constance Farefield."

"Yes—I am aware of it," answered Lord Petersfield. "Indeed, to tell you the truth, I delicately dropped to Lady Saxondale a hint, many months ago, that the Marquis had a wife living. Of course I did not say how I knew it: I pretended to have heard some such thing rumoured when I was in Paris——"

"Well, but you see the marriage has taken place," continued Sir John Marston. "Elizabeth released Villebelle from all engagement towards her—from all bonds or ties——that is to say, so far as she was able. I should have stopped the marriage most effectually, had not Villebelle, when at Dover, whispered in my ear a certain name, which convinced me with startling effect that Elizabeth does possess a clue to past events that may prove dangerous enough for us."

"And that clue?" asked Lord Petersfield, all his diplomatic reserve having given place to intense anxiety.

"The name of Lady Everton was breathed in my ears," rejoined the Baronet.

"Ah! this is awkward," said Petersfield. "But what did you do? what have you done?"

"What could I do? I did not then know where Elizabeth was: nor did I know that she and Mrs. Chandos were one and the same. I thought of doing a thousand things—of hunting her out—of locking her up in a madhouse, if I found her—or even of making away with her if necessary."

"Sir John Marston!" exclaimed Petersfield, becoming white as a sheet.

"Ah! you may affect horror, my lord," resumed the Baronet: "but I was prepared for anything desperate. Yet where was I to search for her? All I knew was that she had recently been to Robson—that's my attorney, you know—to receive some money I allow her. So I wrote to Robson to ask if

he knew where she lived. His reply was that he did not even know whether she was in London. So I remained fretting, and fidgetting, and chafing at Dover, not knowing what on earth to do. At last, as I tell you, the Dover paper of some weeks back, containing the account of that business, fell into my hands; then I saw at once that Elizabeth was the female highwayman who stopped Marlow and Malton, and that she lived somewhere near Edmonton. So I came up to London to-day—and have only just arrived. My first visit is paid to you, that we may consult together."

"Do you happen to have the Dover paper about you?" asked Petersfield: "for I know no more of Marlow's adventure than what he told me at the time."

"Yes—here it is," returned Sir John Marston, producing the journal.

Lord Petersfield took it and commenced reading at the column indicated by the Baronet: but as he continued the perusal, his features began to express a growing amazement; and suddenly rapping his clenched hand upon the table, he ejaculated, "Then, by heaven, it was she!"

"What do you mean?" asked the Baronet hastily.

"I mean that Elizabeth has been here—that she has paid a visit to this house," responded Lord Petersfield in consternation. "I never could fancy what the meaning of that strange creature's intrusion could be. I set her down as mad. Marlow never happened to describe her person to me——"

"But did you not recollect her?" inquired Sir John.

"I never saw her since her earliest childhood," answered the nobleman. "When I took Frank to school at Southampton, I carefully avoided seeing Elizabeth. She was then sixteen: and therefore if she had seen me, she would have remembered me again—which I was naturally anxious to avoid. Ah! this is indeed most threatening. What could she have come hither for? I can't make it out. It was assuredly she. The description in this newspaper is life-like—handsome but largely chiselled features—full lips, somewhat coarse and richly red—teeth white as ivory—olive complexion—a somewhat bold and hardy gaze—a voice strong, but not harsh, and with flute-like tones——Yes, to be sure, it is the same! it is beyond all doubt!"

"But upon what pretence did she come?" demanded the Baronet. "Consider—reflect! You must tax your memory: it is important we should know. It may enable us to form an idea of the extent of the clue which she possesses."

"Ah! a suspicion strikes me," ejaculated Petersfield. "On that very same day, I recollect full well now, her brother Frank was here; and he happened to see that portrait of Lady Everton which was published in the *Court Beauties*. Stop a moment!"

With these words Lord Petersfield hurried from the room: but in less than a minute he returned, holding a book open in his hand;—and advancing up to the Baronet, he showed him where a leaf had been abstracted, exclaiming, "Yes—it is gone!"

"Then rest assured, my lord," replied Sir John Marston, "that they are thoroughly upon the right track; and having discovered who their mother is, they will discover **all the rest**. There will be a terrific exposure. And now, what is to be done?"

"What is to be done indeed?" said Lord Petersfield, pacing the room in considerable agitation, all his studied reserve being scattered to the winds, and his natural feelings triumphing over cold artificiality.

"Yes—what is to be done?" repeated the Baronet. "You are rich, my lord—you have feathered your nest well in various diplomatic services—and you can perhaps afford to disgorge. But with me it is very different! I have no more than I know what to do with; and if I were to give up my share I should be a ruined man. Indeed, it was only to keep the woman quiet and enable her to have enough to live upon, that I have allowed her this four hundred a-year for a little time past. I was fearful that if she fell into poverty she might begin talking to people of the transaction of that marriage—and thus one thing might have led on to another, resulting in the fullest exposure. But I repeat that if I am called upon to refund, I may as well go and drown myself afterwards."

"Besides, the exposure! the disgrace! the damning infamy!" ejaculated Lord Petersfield. "Would to God I had never done it!"

"Ah! you were something like myself in those times, my lord," said Marston bitterly; "too fond of the gaming-table!"

"And Lady Petersfield!" continued the nobleman, not heeding the Baronet's acerbic interjection: "what a blow for her! she who suspects it not! she who has not an idea of all this! And with her diabolical temper too——Why it will be enough to make me blow my brains out!"

"A pretty couple we shall be, then!" said Marston, with that bitter mocking laugh in which despair sometimes breaks forth: "I to drown myself—you to blow your brains out! But what is to be done? It is no use your walking up and down the room like this. Pray resume some of your diplomatic cunning as soon as ever you like. The sooner, too, the better. Fortunately we know where Elizabeth is—at a cottage near Edmonton. The report in the Dover newspaper lets us know that much. Now then, decide. Shall we lock her up in a madhouse? or shall we do that other thing—you know what I mean?"

"Do not allude to it, Sir John Marston!" replied Lord Petersfield impatiently. "I am not so bad as that."

"But I am bad enough for anything," exclaimed Marston, "under such circumstances. I tell you what, Petersfield—an idea has struck me! Let you and I go and lay in wait in the neighbourhood of her residence; and when she comes out, we will shoot her dead. If you are afraid to fire the pistol, I am not. Then we will swear she tried to rob us; and the respectability of your name—your high position—your rank—all will give a colouring to the statement. We may afterwards devise some means to dispose of the boy Frank."

"Sir John Marston, are you mad?" ejaculated the nobleman, becoming white as a sheet.

The Baronet was about to reply, when the door opened, and a footman entered, bearing a card, and intimating that the gentleman whose name it described sought an immediate interview.

"Mr. Gunthorpe?" said Lord Peterfield, instan-

taneously recovering his self-possession on the entrance of the servant, and therewith his habitual reserve and caution. "I do not think—but of course I should not like to say positively,—that I am not acquainted with any one bearing the name of Gunthorpe——However he had better come up: Sir John Marston, you can retire into my private cabinet for a few minutes."

The Baronet accordingly proceeded into a small adjoining room which Lord Petersfield indicated; and almost immediately afterwards Mr. Gunthorpe made his appearance. Lord Petersfield bowed coldly and stiffly: for he thought that his visitor was some citizen dwelling on the eastern side of Temple Bar—and his lordship had a most haughty contempt and supreme disgust for every body of that description.

Mr. Gunthorpe stared very hard at the nobleman—and then said, "I presume that I am addressing Lord Petersfield?"

"Really, Mr. Gunthorpe, I am not prepared—that is to say, I do not think I ought to answer a question so pointedly put. I may be Lord Petersfield—and indeed, after due deliberation, I think I may venture to say that I am—with every proviso requisite under such circumstances."

Mr. Gunthorpe first looked surprised—then indignant—and then disgusted at the nobleman's answer; and deliberately taking a seat, he said, "You had better sit down, my lord: for I desire to have a very serious conversation with you."

"And pray, Mr. Gunthorpe, who may you be?" asked the nobleman, as he gravely and slowly deposited himself in his arm-chair. "Don't be in a hurry to answer—take time to reflect——"

"It needs no time for an honest man to proclaim himself such," was Mr. Gunthorpe's response; and he looked with a strange significancy at Lord Petersfield.

"Your answer is ambiguous," said the nobleman: "it admits of a double meaning. It may be intended to imply a consciousness of your own honesty: or it may be an indirect and not ungraceful tribute to mine."

"Humph!" said Mr. Gunthorpe. "I can assure your lordship I was very far from intending the latter construction to be put upon my words at all. However, this is no occasion for childish trifling. Lord Petersfield, is there nothing upon your conscience with which you can reproach yourself?"

This was indeed a home-thrust question put to the diplomatist; and coming so quickly upon the disagreeable business he had been discussing with Sir John Marston, there can be no wonder that Lord Petersfield should suddenly turn pale and look confused.

"But little more than sixteen years have elapsed," continued Mr. Gunthorpe, again looking very hard in Lord Petersfield's face, "since a certain nobleman who believed that in you he possessed a sincere and faithful friend——"

"Ah!" gasped Petersfield, sinking back in his chair: but in a sudden paroxysm of excitement, he exclaimed, "Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe?"

"The intimate friend of that nobleman," was the reply solemnly and firmly given; "and one who will see that the wrong be righted. All the circumstances of the past are known to me——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," interrupted Petersfield, in an imploring tone, "I beseech you to deal mercifully—I will make every reparation. Where is that nobleman? You did well not to mention his name: for the very walls have ears."

"Yes—and doors too," said Mr. Gunthorpe, whose keen eye had caught sight of one gently opening an inch or two opposite to that by which he had entered; and as he spoke, he rose from his seat—walked straight up to that door—and pulling it completely open, beheld the Baronet retreating from it, having evidently been listening.

A half-suppressed ejaculation escaped Mr. Gunthorpe's lips: for he instantaneously recognized Sir John Marston, on whose person the ravages of time had not been sufficient to prevent such recognition. But not choosing for some reason of his own, to show that he had thus recognized him, Mr. Gunthorpe turned round to Lord Petersfield, demanding sternly, "Who is your lordship's eaves-dropper?"

"I am Sir John Marston," the Baronet at once said: for Lord Petersfield, again sinking back aghast in his seat, could not utter a word. "You are Mr. Gunthorpe, as I understand, and I have heard you touch upon a certain delicate matter. Perhaps, therefore, I may be admitted to the conference?"

"Most assuredly," rejoined the old gentleman, with accents of significant bitterness: "for if you are Sir John Marston, you are as much interested in it as Lord Petersfield himself."

"Granted!" exclaimed the Baronet: and he spoke with a degree of insolent hardihood which made Lord Petersfield think that he had devised some means of averting the threatened exposure.

"Well then, Sir John Marston," resumed Mr. Gunthorpe, "inasmuch as you have been listening at that door, I need not repeat the words I have already spoken to Lord Petersfield. But as the friend and confidant of *a certain nobleman*," he continued, accentuating his words, "I demand an account of the stewardship of you, Lord Petersfield—of you also, Sir John Marston—in respect to the sum of one hundred thousand pounds deposited in your joint hands sixteen years ago, for the benefit of Elizabeth and Francis Paton."

"And are we to understand," said Marston, "that there is a very delicate anxiety and tender interest entertained in a certain quarter with regard to these said persons Elizabeth and Francis?"

"Most assuredly!" responded Mr. Gunthorpe, with a stern look. "How dare you assume, by your very tone and manner, that it can be otherwise?"

"I assume nothing of the sort," replied the Baronet. "I will ask one question. Have you, Mr. Gunthorpe, as the friend and confidant of a certain nobleman, seen these persons, Elizabeth and Francis?"

"I have—I have seen them both: it is barely an hour since I left them. That they have been wronged—cruelly, scandalously wronged—is but too evident: but they themselves are unconscious of the extent——"

"And pray, Mr. Gunthorpe," inquired Marston, with a sardonic smile upon his countenance, "did Elizabeth make known to you the pleasant pursuits in which she has recently been engaged?"

"What mean you, sir?" cried Mr. Gunthorpe, angrily. "I have every reason to believe——"

"Believe nothing without being convinced," in-

terrupted Marston. "Here: take and read this document!"

As he thus spoke, the Baronet spread open the Dover newspaper before Mr. Gunthorpe; and the old gentleman began to read the column pointed out to him. Gradually did a strange excitement come over him: he grew pale as death—subdued ejaculations escaped his lips—his agitation was extreme. Sir John Marston threw a significant look at Lord Petersfield — a look in which a sardonic triumph was blended with a conviction of their own safety.

Mr. Gunthorpe finished reading the report—drew his hand across his brow, as if with a pang of ineffable mental agony—and then looked at the paper again. He longed to start up in a fury and denounce the whole affair as a fraud or a delusion: he longed to proclaim his conviction that the Mrs. Chandos of Dover was not the Elizabeth in whom he was interested, and a different being from Mrs. Chandos the highwaywoman. But when he reflected that from Henrietta's lips he had heard how Elizabeth had appeared in male attire when she rescued that young girl from Beech-Tree Lodge, he was staggered—he was confounded. And the description, too, which Marlow had given before the Dover magistrate of the female highwayman, tallied so completely with the portrait which the newspaper report drew of the Mrs. Chandos who appeared as a prisoner on the occasion, that it was impossible to doubt! Even the extraordinary nature of the evidence given at that investigation before the Mayor of Dover, though to all appearance establishing an *alibi*, could not possibly prove satisfactory to a man of Mr. Gunthorpe's shrewdness and intelligence. Alas, yes! he could come to no other conclusion than the one fatal to the character of Elizabeth Paton. And this idea was sadly and terribly confirmed, when he recalled to mind her own words, uttered to him ere now—that although as a woman she was pure and chaste, yet that her life had not been free from faults. The poor old gentleman was overwhelmed—almost annihilated; and after remaining in utter consternation and dismay for a few minutes, he gave vent to his grief in tears.

"That will be a shocking account," observed Sir John Marston, with an ill-subdued malignity, "for you to forward to that nobleman whose friend and confidant you are."

"Villain!" ejaculated Mr. Gunthorpe, suddenly dashing away the tears from his eyes and turning his indignant looks upon the Baronet: "all this must be your work—and your's also, my lord! Had you both performed your duty towards that young woman, she never could have been forced into such ways as these. But there shall be vengeance and punishment for your iniquities!"

Thus speaking, Mr. Gunthorpe sprang up from his seat, and was hurriedly quitting the room—when Sir John Marston called out, "Stop! you had better do nothing rash! Remember, the honour of Lady Everton may be at stake!"

Mr. Gunthorpe was struck by the circumstance thus announced, and which for the moment he had forgotten. He *did* therefore stop short; and returning to the chair he had so abruptly left, sat down and reflected for upwards of a minute.

"I find," he said at length, "that I have to deal with villains of no ordinary stamp. Yes—you are right, Sir John Marston: there can be no exposure—no vengeance. But rest assured that punishment of another kind will overtake both yourself and your accomplice, Lord Petersfield. Your conscience, Sir John Marston—and your's likewise, my lord, will not suffer you to remain for ever indifferent to this signal iniquity which you have perpetrated. I leave you therefore to the enjoyment of your ill-gotten gains—to the pangs of remorse which sooner or later will inevitably overtake you! I leave you to all the consequences of a guilt which heaven cannot suffer to go unpunished."

Having thus spoken in accents of a withering bitterness, Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat and quitted the room.

"There! you see how splendidly I have managed it!" exclaimed Sir John Marston, the moment the door closed behind the old gentleman. "We are safe—we are safe. I feel more at ease than I have done for a long, long time past."

Lord Petersfield, now beginning to breathe freely, remarked, "Yes—the affair has indeed taken a turn which I had little anticipated."

"The idea struck me all in a moment," observed Sir John, "as I listened at that door. I can't tell how it was—but it occurred to me, somehow or another, that the visit of this Mr. Gunthorpe was connected with the business we had been talking on. I suppose it was because that business was uppermost in my thoughts at the time. However, such was my impression: and it induced me to listen. Thus you see, Petersfield, that while you, with all your diplomatic astuteness, would have suffered yourself to be crushed down to the dust by that old bully, I got rid of him by riding the high horse and taking the matter with an air of hardihood and effrontery."

"It is indeed fortunate," observed Petersfield, "that we have got rid of this unpleasant affair so easily. But think you we shall hear no more of it?"

"I am confident we shall not," replied Marston. "I will stake my existence upon it. This Gunthorpe is evidently deep in a certain nobleman's secrets. Did you see how he was affected? That was at the idea of having to shock his friend—*this certain nobleman*," added Marston malignantly—"with an account of Elizabeth's ways of life. And then too, there is the necessity of saving Lady Everton's name from exposure and disgrace—which is another safeguard for us. Had the matter rested alone with Elizabeth and Frank, we might not have got out of it so comfortably. But as it is, we are safe, and need trouble ourselves no more upon the matter. I shall even go to Robson and tell him that for the future he need not pay the quarterly allowance to Elizabeth. It will be four hundred a-year in my pocket; and thus altogether my visit to London has terminated most fortunately instead of inauspicuously."

"But who is this Mr. Gunthorpe, think you?" asked Lord Petersfield.

"No matter who he is," rejoined Marston: "he has ceased to become an object of terror for us."

With these words the Baronet took his leave of the nobleman, and quitted the house in high glee and joyous triumph at the result of the whole adventure.

FLORINA

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE LAWYER.

ABOUT half-an-hour after Sir John Marston had taken his departure from Lord Petersfield's presence, Mr. Malton was announced. This gentleman, as our readers will recollect, was the junior and more grave and steady partner of the eminent legal firm; and though perhaps he possessed not the same sharp-witted qualities as Mr. Marlow, yet he had none of that gentleman's excitability, which often merged into rashness.

"Well, Malton," said Petersfield, who, being very intimate with the lawyers, treated them with a corresponding familiarity, "what has brought you hither this afternoon? Some new freak of Saxondale's?"

"No, my lord: my business on the present occasion," responded Malton, "regards her ladyship: and as you are so old standing a friend of the family, Mr. Marlow and I have deemed it to be our duty to consult you in the present case."

"And pray what is it?" asked his lordship, looking awfully grave and important at what he took to be a compliment paid to his wisdom and judgment.

"It is an unpleasant business," said Mr. Malton. "Perchance your lordship may have heard of a certain William Deveril?"

"Without committing myself in too positive a manner," replied the nobleman, "I think I may venture to state that I have heard of such a person. Nay, more—I will go so far as to admit that I have seen him at Lady Saxondale's house; and I believe—but I would not pledge myself beyond the possibility of retraction—that he taught the young ladies some particular style of painting."

"Precisely so, my lord. Does it also happen that you have heard a certain tale respecting his behaviour to her ladyship?" inquired the attorney.

"This is a very pointed question, Malton," answered Lord Petersfield; "and though not in the habit of replying without due deliberation, I think that in the present case I may admit that I have heard something of the kind."

"It is relative to this I wish to consult your lordship. Mr. Deveril, it appears, denies the truth of the story altogether; and a gentleman, who has taken up the matter very warmly on his behalf, is about to instruct his attorney to bring an action for defamation against Lady Saxondale."

"You had better, Malton, tell me the name of that gentleman. But do not speak too hastily—— reflect on what you are going to say——you might mention a wrong name. I once knew a person, answering too quickly, give the name of Noakes instead of Brogson. So pray be careful."

"There is no need of reflection, my lord," responded the attorney, with a smile. "The gentleman's name is Gunthorpe."

"Ah, Gunthorpe!" ejaculated the nobleman, with a start; for his name had now become an ominous and inauspicious one for him.

"Yes, my lord. Do you know him?"

"Know him, Malton? I should not like to speak so positively as to avow that I know him: but he was certainly here upon a little private business an hour back."

"Mr. Gunthorpe here?" exclaimed Mr. Malton. "And did he not mention this circumstance to your lordship? for of course he must know that your lordship is a friend of the Saxondale family."

"He did not mention the circumstance, Malton. I think that I may go so far as to assure you that he did not—I am certain that I may."

"Well then, I must explain how the matter stands. Some time back—as much as a fortnight ago—Mr. Gunthorpe came to our office, and explained his business, as I have already intimated to your lordship. He agreed to suspend all proceedings for one week, on condition that we would write to her ladyship upon the subject. It however appears that business has prevented Mr. Gunthorpe from returning to us until yesterday; and then he came to inquire what we proposed to do on behalf of her ladyship in the matter. Now, we have received two or three letters from her ladyship with reference thereto; and the last one, which came to hand yesterday morning, bade us defend any action that might be brought against her ladyship—as she adhered to her original statement, and defied Mr. Deveril to asperse her good name."

"Well then, Malton," said Lord Petersfield, "I suppose you must defend the action."

"But consider, my lord, the inconvenience of dragging her ladyship's name before the tribunals on such a subject. Your lordship is well aware of the wickedness of the world; and there will be found plenty of persons ready enough to take Deveril's part."

"But what is your opinion, Malton?" inquired the nobleman: "and what does Deveril allege?"

The lawyer proceeded to explain in detail the particulars of that interview which had taken place with Mr. Gunthorpe in Parliament Street, and which was duly chronicled in our narrative.

"More than ever," continued Malton, "did Mr. Gunthorpe insist yesterday upon what he had previously stated. He warns us, if we value Lady Saxondale's reputation, not to let her go to trial. He says that he possesses evidence the nature of which we little suspect, and which will prove damnatory to her ladyship. He declares that he has no particular desire to bring this matter before the public—but that his only object is to clear up his young friend Deveril's reputation. I must confess that he spoke so fairly, and at the same time in a tone of such solemn warning, that both Marlow and myself entertain serious apprehensions concerning the matter."

"Do you mean me to understand," asked Lord Petersfield, "that you think it quite possible Mr. Deveril's version may be the right one, and Lady Saxondale's the erroneous one? Don't speak hastily—take time to consider——"

"I have considered the matter—and very seriously," responded Malton. "At first both myself and Marlow felt indignant at the slur thus thrown upon her ladyship's reputation: we thought of the purity of her life—the untarnished character she has maintained—the dignified virtue which has appeared to place her beyond the reach even of suspicion. But Mr. Gunthorpe so pointedly and emphatically assured us that he possessed the means, not merely of proving Deveril's case, but likewise of ruining her ladyship's fair fame beyond the possibility of redemption, that Marlow and I scarcely

know what to think. In short, we resolved to consult your lordship in this most delicate and unpleasant matter. Heaven forbid that I," Mr. Malton went on to say, "should lend myself to unworthy or unjust suspicions: but we do know, Lord Petersfield, that women sometimes take strange whims and caprices into their head; and if it should have happened that Lady Saxondale, in a moment of weakness, spoke or looked tenderly to this young man, who, as your lordship well knows, is of extraordinary beauty——In a word, my lord, we are all frail beings in this world."

Lord Petersfield, when looking inward to the depths of his own conscience, knew full well that Mr. Malton had just given utterance to a solemn truth; and the circumstances of his own position naturally led him to reflect that it was quite possible, and even probable, that Lady Saxondale *had* laid herself open to grave aspersions. There was he —Lord Petersfield—a man who had filled high diplomatic offices—whose honour and integrity frequently became the subject of compliment on the part of his brother-peers in the Upper House—who was occasionally alluded to in certain newspapers as a man of unimpeachable rectitude—and who, in money-affairs, was looked upon by all who knew him as an individual of scrupulous nicety,—there he was, occupying this proud position, and yet harbouring the secret consciousness that he was a vile plunderer of orphans—a base betrayer of the confidence which a generous friendship had reposed in him—the accomplice of men of infamous character in the doing of infamous deeds! Such he knew himself to be, while the world at large thought him so very different. Might not the case be somewhat similar with Lady Saxondale? Might not all the pride of her virtue be a mere outward assumption—a mask—an hypocrisy—a deceit? Besides, did not Lord Petersfield himself know enough of the world—particularly of that aristocratic sphere in which he moved—to be well aware that female frailties were often hidden beneath a consummate dissimulation? And was there not within his own knowledge the special case of Lady Everton—that case in all the ramifying results of which he had been so mixed up?

These varied reflections swept rapidly through the mind of Lord Petersfield, as Mr. Malton had been speaking; and for upwards of a minute he remained silent.

"Well, my dear sir," he at length said, "there may be something worthy of consideration in your remarks. But do you not see that it is a very difficult matter to deal with? Assuredly, Lady Saxondale must not be permitted to rush headlong into disgrace. She may not know the nature of the evidence that her opponents are possessed of against her. Persons—as you of course are even better aware than myself—frequently go to law with the confident hope that everything which is really damnatory to themselves is unknown to their opponents"

"Just so, my lord," said Mr. Malton: "and then, when it all comes out, and they find themselves overwhelmed with disgrace and confusion, they bitterly regret their folly in having persevered with law. I was thinking that if your lordship would only write a pressing letter to Lady Saxondale—or what would be much better, proceed into Lincolnshire and obtain a personal interview—you might, with that delicacy and tact which your lordship knows so well how to use, induce her ladyship to empower Marlow and myself to compromise this matter."

"I cannot possibly give an immediate answer," said the nobleman. "It requires deliberation it is something to be pondered upon: I could not undertake anything rash——"

"But the affair is urgent, my lord," said Mr. Malton. "In two or three days, unless we are prepared to do something, Mr. Gunthorpe's attorney will commence proceedings."

"Well, my dear sir, I must take the rest of this day to consider the matter," rejoined Lord Petersfield; "and I will let you know to-morrow. If I decide upon proceeding into Lincolnshire——"

"You will in that case," added Malton, wishing to nail the nobleman to this particular course, "start to-morrow morning?"

"Start, Mr. Malton?" observed the diplomatist, looking very grave and very suspicious. "I never *start*. I never do anything in a hurry. I do not *start*, as you term it: I *take my departure*."

"I beg your lordship's pardon for having used so improper a term," said the lawyer: "I will be more guarded in future."

At this moment the footman entered, bearing a large official-looking packet with an enormous seal. Lord Petersfield took it from the silver salver on which it was presented—placed it solemnly before him—and waited until the servant had withdrawn before he broke the seal. Then he opened the despatch—looked slowly round the room to convince himself that there was nobody but Malton present with him—and lastly fixed his eyes upon the lawyer himself, as if to acquire the additional certainty that this gentleman was not prepared to take any undue advantage of the packet being opened in his presence. Malton perfectly understood what was passing in the mind of the cautious diplomatist; and he could not help smiling as he rose to take his leave. But the nobleman bade him remain for a few minutes until he had examined the despatch: Mr. Malton accordingly resumed his seat, while Lord Petersfield slowly and solemnly perused the contents of the document he had just received. Having done this, he folded it up again—placed it in the envelope—tied a piece of red tape round the packet—and then deliberately endorsed it with the day of the month and the very hour at which he had received it.

"It is as I thought," said his lordship, "when I begged you to remain. I have just received an announcement——and when I tell you this, Malton, it is with the deliberate conviction that I am justified in so telling you——that I cannot possibly proceed into Lincolnshire. All I can do, is to write to Lady Saxondale. Her Majesty's Ministers, having every confidence in my ability, caution, and wariness, have selected me for a special mission to the Imperial Court of Vienna. It is not altogether unexpected—I think I may go so far as to state that I did positively expect it——"

Again the door opened; and the footman said, "Please your lordship, Lord Saxondale requests a few minutes' interview with your lordship."

"Let Lord Saxondale be introduced," said the nobleman.

"Well, you see," exclaimed Edmund, as he en-

tered the room, "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer; and so I have resolved to go abroad."

Lord Petersfield looked positively aghast at what he considered to be the precipitate and reckless manner in which the young nobleman spoke; while his dignity was offended by the omission of those ceremonial phrases and compliments with which he expected that every visit should invariably commence Mr. Malton was also surprised at the abrupt and ejaculatory language that Edmund made use of.

"Sit down," said Lord Petersfield, pompously indicating a chair; "and when you have recovered breath and are perfectly master of your thoughts, have the goodness to explain what sort of thing it is you cannot stand."

"Why, I am sick of London-life," exclaimed Saxondale, flinging himself upon one chair and putting his legs up on another. "I wish I had accepted your lordship's proposal of a few weeks back, about being attached to that foreign embassy, you know. Of course you are well aware from that list of debts I sent in, that poor Emily Archer and I were on very intimate terms together; and also as a matter of course, you have read the account in the newspapers of her mysterious death."

"I have no doubt," said Lord Petersfield, gravely, "that she was about to pay a visit to Saxondale Castle at the time — perhaps thinking you were there—or perhaps to see her ladyship for some purpose——"

"Well, I can't say," interrupted Edmund; "and I don't like talking of the business: it has upset me very much. Besides, I am so precious dull all by myself in Park Lane——'

"Then wherefore," inquired Mr. Malton, "do you not join the family circle down in Lincolnshire? I understand that Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton are there——"

"No: they came back to town yesterday," observed Edmund. "I learnt it by accident. My valet happened to see them arrive."

"And pray, Lord Saxondale," asked Petersfield, severely, "have you not been this day to pay your respect to that lady who is affianced to you?"

"Can't say that I have," responded Edmund, "But I shall go there presently. The fact is, I am very much afraid Florina must have learnt on what terms I was with poor Emily; and if so, all will be up in that quarter. I wish to go abroad for a few months; and therefore I came to tell your lordship that I will accept of that post——"

"It is no longer vacant," remarked Petersfield: "but if you are serious, Edmund, you can accompany *me*. For her Majesty's Ministers have entrusted me with a special mission to Vienna——"

"And when do you propose to leave?" asked Saxondale, making a slight grimace at the thought of accompanying his guardian.

"In three days," returned Lord Petersfield. "But if you really purpose to go with me, you must make up your mind to-morrow."

"It's made up at once. I will go!" exclaimed Edmund; "and there's my hand upon it."

Lord Petersfield just took the tips of Edmund's fingers in a cold grasp, and began to give him some advice—which the young nobleman did not think it worth while to wait for; and bidding both his lordship and Mr. Malton good bye, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE DISCARDED SUITOR.

We must now return to Mr. Gunthorpe, whom we left at the moment when he departed from the presence of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston. Returning to his carriage, which was waiting, the old gentleman ordered himself to be driven to Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square; but as the vehicle proceeded thither, he felt almost inclined to issue a fresh instruction and postpone his visit to Lady Macdonald until the following day. He felt anxious—deeply anxious—to return to Lady Bess's cottage: but on mature reflection he resolved to let the interval of a night pass, so that he should have ample leisure to compose the feelings which had been so cruelly tortured, and thus prepare himself for an interview which he foresaw would be attended with painful circumstances. He therefore allowed the carriage to proceed towards Cavendish Square; and by the time it had reached Lady Macdonald's residence, Mr. Gunthorpe had so far regained his wonted composure that whatever he felt inwardly, was no longer reflected in his countenance.

That his visit at Lady Macdonald's had been expected, was evident from the circumstance that the moment he announced his name he was conducted into a parlour, where her ladyship immediately joined him. Florina was not present at this interview, which lasted for upwards of an hour. Mr. Gunthorpe and Lady Macdonald had much to talk upon: but we cannot at present explain the nature of their discourse. Suffice it to say that at the expiration of the colloquy, Mr. Gunthorpe accompanied Lady Macdonald up into the drawing-room, where Florina was seated. This young lady, rising from her chair, hastened forward to bestow the most cordial welcome upon her lover's much-valued friend; and it was even with a species of paternal kindness that the old gentleman treated Florina.

"Now, I dare say," he exclaimed, making her sit beside him upon a sofa, "that you are very anxious indeed to know what has taken place between me and your aunt? Well, I think, my dear Florina—for so you must permit me to call you—that your aunt will give you the welcome intelligence that she is perfectly satisfied with a certain young gentleman's rectitude of conduct——"

"Ah, Mr. Gunthorpe!" murmured Florina, with blushes upon her cheeks and the light of joy dancing in her beauteous eyes; "how can I sufficiently thank you for having thus cleared up the character of one——"

"Whom you love so dearly—eh?" interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "Ah! you need not throw that dismayed look at your aunt. She will not reproach you for having kept this love a secret from her. She knows everything now."

"Yes, dearest Florina," said Lady Macdonald, speaking with a most affectionate kindness; "Mr Gunthorpe has told me everything, and I shall not chide you. To tell you the truth, for the last two or three weeks I have myself entertained serious misgivings as to whether your happiness was being truly and really consulted by this engagement with Lord Saxondale. But now I can hesitate no longer in giving you the assurance that it must be broken off."

"Oh, my dear aunt!" exclaimed the beauteous girl, bounding from her seat and embracing Lady Macdonald fervently. "You know not what happiness your words have given me! It was only in obedience to your wishes that I ever consented to receive a suit all along so odious to me."

"We will say no more upon that part of the subject, my dear Flo," interrupted her ladyship. "Mr. Gunthorpe has made me fully aware of the impropriety and imprudence of opposing the natural current of the heart's affections. Besides, Florina, I have ceased to entertain any respect for Lady Saxondale. I have heard such sad things concerning her——But you are already acquainted with them all: Mr. Deveril has informed you of everything."

"And Mr. Deveril will receive permission," added Mr. Gunthorpe, "to pay his respects to you, Florina, at your aunt's house."

Need we say that a still sunnier joy than her eyes had already shown, now danced in those beauteous orbs—or that still deeper blushes appeared upon Florina's cheeks? This was indeed a moment of happiness well and amply repaying her for any past sorrows she had endured. Again did she embrace her aunt; and then returning to her seat by Mr. Gunthorpe's side, she took his hand, and pressed it gratefully to her lips.

"But what about my poor brother?" she said, after a pause, and while a cloud suddenly gathered upon her brow.

"Where is he at this moment?" demanded Mr. Gunthorpe. "Oh! I recollect. Your aunt told me just now: he remains at Saxondale Castle—having been thrown from a horse about a week back. But fortunately he has received no serious hurt. Now, Florina, the conduct of your brother is far from satisfactory to those who are interested in him: but he must be left to his own course for the present."

"Ah! I have the most serious apprehensions on his account!" exclaimed Florina. "I fear lest that wicked woman Lady Saxondale——"

"Well, but we must talk no more upon that subject now," interrupted Mr. Gunthorpe. "From all I know of your brother, he is not a man to be either persuaded or coerced into one particular course when he has set his mind on another. However, do not be afraid that he will be altogether lost sight of——"

At this moment the door opened, and a domestic entered to announce that Lord Saxondale had just called. Both Lady Macdonald and Florina threw quick glances of inquiry upon Mr. Gunthorpe to ascertain from his looks what course he would recommend: and he at once made a sign that the young nobleman should be shown up.

"It will be as well," he said, when the domestic had quitted the room, "that this stripling should be frankly dealt with at once; and as the opportunity presents itself, let the explanation take place in my presence. You, Lady Macdonald, must speak; but rest assured that I shall come to your rescue, if he dares display any of his flippant impertinence."

Scarcely had Mr. Gunthorpe finished speaking, when the door opened again, and Lord Saxondale was announced. Approhensive, as the reader has already seen, that his affair with Emily Archer might be known in Cavendish Square, he had determined to put a bold face on the matter; and therefore he was entering the room with a jaunty free-and-easy look and manner, when he was taken considerably aback on beholding Mr. Gunthorpe. For knowing that the old gentleman had been in Lincolnshire at the time of the murder, he could not help fancying that his presence at Lady Macdonald's on this occasion, was to give some explanation or warning not altogether favourable to his (Saxondale's) engagement with Florina. He therefore started, and stopped short for a moment: but quickly recovering his effrontery, he exclaimed, "Ah, Mr. Gunthorpe! What—are *you* here?"

"You see that I am," responded the old gentleman; "and this time, Lord Saxondale, I do not think that you will threaten to have me kicked out of the house, as you did when last we met—which was in Park Lane."

"Oh! never mind the past," ejaculated the young nobleman, looking somewhat confused however: then advancing towards the young lady, he extended his hand, saying, "Well, Flo, so you have got back from Lincolnshire?"

She did not accept the proffered hand; and her look remained grave—but no word passed her lips.

"Cool, eh?" muttered Lord Saxondale to himself: then turning towards the aunt, he said, "And how is your ladyship? Why, what the deuce is the matter? You all seem so uncommonly serious!"

"Perhaps your lordship will sit down," interrupted Lady Macdonald, pointing to a chair at a little distance from the group: "for it is necessary that you should receive a certain explanation from my lips."

Edmund took the chair accordingly, and endeavoured to assume—or rather to persevere in the assumption of an off-hand and unconcerned manner: but he nevertheless felt confused and uneasy.

"My lord," continued Lady Macdonald, "from some additional particulars which have appeared in the newspapers relative to a certain lamentable tragedy—and which particulars cannot have escaped your notice—it is but too evident that one of the unfortunate victims had for several weeks past been living under your protection."

"Well, what of it?" ejaculated Edmund. "I am not married to Flo yet; and of course should have cut the concern as soon as we were married. These things are always done by young men; and I don't suppose you want to make me an exception to the general rule."

"It is not to argue the point, Lord Saxondale," said Mr. Gunthorpe, with a severe look, "that her ladyship was addressing you—but to make a certain announcement which it is needful you should hear."

"Oh, I can guess what's coming!" cried Edmund snappishly: "but I am not to be put off so easy, I can tell you. What the deuce, Mr. Gunthorpe, have you got to do with the business? why are you poking your nose in the affair? And by the bye, if you have been telling any tales about me, I can tell one about you. That day you dined with Lord Haroki in Jermyn Street, didn't you get most blazing drunk?"

"No, sir," responded Mr. Gunthorpe sternly: "I affected to be overcome with liquor, in order that I

might see the extent to which Lord Harold and yourself would go in your endeavours to enmesh me in your snares. If Lord Harold showed you the next day the letter which I sent him, you must have seen full well that not for a single moment was I made your dupe. I suffered myself to be robbed of a few thousand pounds for a certain reason of my own——But of that no matter. You would now do well to attend to what Lady Macdonald may have to say."

"Well then, what is it?" demanded Edmund, his lips trembling with rage as he bent his spiteful looks upon Florina's aunt—while the young damsel herself sat by Mr. Gunthorpe's side, grave and serious, and with her eyes bent down.

"I do not wish, Lord Saxondale," resumed Lady Macdonald, "to touch more than is necessary upon that lamentable occurrence which, if you possess any heart at all, must have affected you. But it is necessary for me to state that I consider your conduct in maintaining such a connexion while formally engaged to my niece, to have been most disgraceful. Therefore, you cannot be surprised when I request that you will consider her engagement with yourself to exist no longer."

"Indeed, I shall consider nothing of the sort!" he exclaimed flippantly. "I am well aware that Flo loves me—I am sure of it—although she may be offended at the moment."

"Lady Florina Staunton," said the aunt, with severe tone and look, "has only been kept in the room during this unpleasant scene, that she may, if necessary, give from her own lips an assurance entirely corroborative of mine."

"What!" ejaculated Edmund: "do you mean to tell me, Flo, that you don't love me? I'm sure you won't say *that?*"

"I am compelled to speak plainly and frankly in this matter," replied the young maiden, with a modest dignity. "I am desirous, Lord Saxondale, that the engagement should be broken off between us."

"It is you who have done this mischief!" cried the nobleman, starting up from his seat and addressing Mr. Gunthorpe menacingly. "You are poking your nose in everywhere — bullying my mother in the first place—and now thrusting yourself into my affairs. What the deuce does it all mean? and pray who are you?"

"Lord Saxondale," said the old gentleman, slowly rising from the sofa and bending a stern look upon the aristocratic stripling, "it is altogether useless for you to affect the airs of the bully with me. If you dare to talk thus in the presence of one of your own sex, it is not difficult to imagine what your conduct would be before these ladies, were they unprotected and alone."

"Oh! don't take things up quite so sharp," ejaculated Edmund, overawed by the old gentleman's demeanour: then turning to Lady Macdonald, he said, "I hope you will forgive me for the past—I don't want to break off with Flo—I am very fond of her—and I will turn over a new leaf and be quite steady. Indeed, I mean to leave London for two or three months: I have just been with Lord Petersfield, who is going as Ambassador-Extraordinary to Vienna—and I am to accompany him. The fact is, I am heartily sick of the life I have been leading, and want change of scene: but if you desire it, Lady Macdonald, I will stay in London, and show you that I can become more steady."

"I am glad, Edmund," said her ladyship, in a kinder tone than she had before used, "to hear you talk in this manner; and I do most sincerely hope that you will reform. I think you would do well to absent yourself for a time — especially as you are going with your guardian Lord Petersfield—a nobleman of such high honour and integrity——"

Here a suppressed ejaculation from Mr. Gunthorpe drew all attention towards him: but he suddenly fell into a fit of coughing so as to cover the abrupt paroxysm of grief and rage into which that eulogy upon Lord Petersfield had thrown him.

"Yes, Edmund," continued Lady Macdonald, "you will do well to proceed to the Continent. But the decision which you have heard pronounced, is irrevocable; and from this moment you must look upon Florina only as a mere acquaintance. I shall to-morrow write to Lady Saxondale to inform her that the engagement is broken off."

Edmund turned abruptly away—muttered some threatening words to Mr. Gunthorpe, who heeded them not—and flung himself out of the room, banging the door violently behind him. A few minutes afterwards Mr. Gunthorpe himself took his departure, and entering his carriage, ordered it to drive to William Deveril's villa near the Regent's Park.

He found our young hero and Angela walking together in their little garden. The beautiful maiden was now fully acquainted with her brother's love for Florina; and we need scarcely say that she entertained the most fervent hope it would be crowned with happiness. They knew that Mr. Gunthorpe had written to Lady Macdonald at Saxondale Castle—knew also that in this letter he had made an appointment to call upon her at her own house in Cavendish Square on that particular afternoon of which we are speaking—and they therefore expected that he would call at their villa on his way back to Stamford Hill. Nor were they disappointed: for at about five o'clock in the evening, their worthy old friend made his appearance. Most cordial was the greeting he received from the brother and sister: they conducted him into their tastefully furnished parlour—and he gladly accepted of some refreshments; for he had taken nothing since he left his own house in the morning.

Not a single word to William and Angela did Mr. Gunthorpe breathe of the circumstances which had so deeply saddened him that day: but when he had taken a glass of wine and a mouthful of food, he proceeded to speak upon the subject for which he had specially called on the present occasion.

"I told you, my dear young friends," he said, "that I wrote four days back to Lady Macdonald at Saxondale Castle, explaining to her sufficient to make her comprehend the necessity of withdrawing herself and her niece at once from Lady Saxondale's society. Lady Macdonald, not choosing to break with Lady Saxondale abruptly until she should have received fuller particulars from my lips, proffered some pretext to account for the speedy departure of herself and Florina from the castle. They arrived in town yesterday; and just now, according to an intimation which I gave Lady Macdonald in my letter, I called in Cavendish Square. Need I tell you, William, that you now stand higher

in Lady Macdonald's opinion than ever? need I assure you that she is fully convinced of your innocence and of Lady Saxondale's guilt? But there is one piece of intelligence which I must hasten to give you: which is, that the engagement is broken off with Lord Saxondale—and you are now the accepted suitor of Lady Florina Staunton."

A cry of joy, fervid and enthusiastic, burst from the lips of William Deveril, as he threw himself upon his knees, and taking Mr. Gunthorpe's hand, pressed it between both his own. Tears of mingled gratitude and delight trickled from the dark eyes of the lovely Angela; and Mr. Gunthorpe was deeply affected by the scene of happiness which he thus witnessed and of which he was the author.

He soon afterwards took his departure; but on his way back to his own mansion at Stamford Hill, he stopped for a few moments at Mrs. Leyden's dwelling to inform Henrietta that he was perfectly satisfied with the result of his interview with Adolphus at Mrs. Chandos's cottage, and that she had every hope of bliss to anticipate from that young nobleman's love. Thus did the old gentleman, while his own heart was secretly devoured with care, busy himself to promote the happiness of others; and to a certain extent it was a relief to his own sorrows that he was enabled to do so.

At eleven o'clock on the following day, Mr. Gunthorpe's carriage again drew up in front of the picturesque cottage near Edmonton. Elizabeth immediately came forth to welcome the old gentleman; and she informed him that her brother and Adolphus had gone out together for a long ramble in the neighbouring lanes and fields.

"I am glad of it," said Mr. Gunthorpe, kindly but mournfully; "for I wish to have a serious—a very serious conversation with you. Will you be enabled to give me two or three hours of your time this morning?"

"Yes—assuredly," responded Elizabeth: but she was struck by the mournfulness of Mr. Gunthorpe's look and manner—and the truth flashed in unto her mind.

The old gentleman dismissed his carriage for the present, bidding the coachman return at two o'clock; and he then entered the parlour with Lady Bess.

Closing the door, she looked him full in the face—but yet with an expression of profound sorrow and humiliation on her features—saying, "Mr. Gunthorpe, do you not despise me? do you not scorn and loathe me?"

"My God, no!" he ejaculated with a strange excitement: and taking her hand, he pressed it long and warmly, while the tears ran down his cheeks. "You suspect, Elizabeth, that I have learnt something concerning you——"

"Yes—I see it in your manner—I know that you have!" she answered, weeping. "But how is it possible that you could come near me again? how is it that you can thus demonstrate so much kind and generous feeling towards me? Who are you, Mr. Gunthorpe? Tell me who you are! That is a question which I have asked myself a thousand times since you were here yesterday—a question that I must ask a thousand times again until you solve it!"

"I cannot now, Elizabeth," replied the old gentleman. "But shortly—very shortly—I may do so. Suffice it for you to know that I entertain the warmest and sincerest interest in your behalf."

"Oh, that proof of munificence which you left with me yesterday!" exclaimed Lady Bess. "It is a fortune! But see—I have not dared to avail myself of your bounty! I give it you back again: for now that you know all, you must feel how thoroughly unworthy I am of your kindness:"—and as she spoke, she drew forth from her bosom the cheque which Mr. Gunthorpe had left on the preceding day.

"Keep it, Elizabeth—keep it—it is your's," he said, gently pushing back her hand which held the draft. "Would to heaven that ten thousand times the amount would redeem the past!"

"Ah, would that I *could* redeem it!" ejaculated Elizabeth: "but at least I may atone for it—and most solemn is my resolve to make such atonement."

"I came not to reproach you, my dear Elizabeth," said Mr. Gunthorpe, still profoundly affected—"but to hear from your lips the narrative of that Past for which you promise atonement. I am sure you will not refuse me your confidence."

"No—not for worlds!" cried Lady Bess, with unfeigned sincerity. "Your goodness towards me demands it—and I feel also, without knowing why, that you have a right to expect it. Most sacredly do I assure you, Mr. Gunthorpe, that my mind was made up to tell you everything the next time you called, even though you should not have elsewhere discovered that dread secret which has filled you with so much generous affliction on my behalf. Oh! but I have been haunted by the fear, ever since you left this house yesterday, that you would never return! I was seized with a presentiment that you were going somewhere to make inquiries that would bring to your knowledge this sad phase in my eventful life; and methought that if you did thus learn it, you would cast me out with scorn and loathing from your memory."

"No, Elizabeth—I could not do that," said Mr. Gunthorpe: "and that I could not, the proof is that I am here again to-day! And now that I have given you the assurance that it is not my purpose to reproach you, I beg you will delay not, my dear Elizabeth, in lifting the veil that covers the mystery of your life. Conceal nothing from me. Whatsoever you may have to confess, will not draw vituperation from my lips: nothing but sympathy shall flow thence. You have not known me long but perhaps you have seen enough of me to trust in this assurance?"

"If any encouragement were wanting," said Elizabeth, deeply moved, "to induce me to make the fullest revelations, it has just been given in these kind words that you have spoken."

She seated herself near Mr. Gunthorpe; and in a calm firm voice, commenced her narrative in the following manner.

CHAPTER LXXX.

COMMENCEMENT OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"The earliest period of existence to which my memory can be carried back, is connected with this cottage. Here I dwelt in my infancy, with an

elderly lady named Mrs. Burnaby, whom I was taught to regard as my grandmother. She was moderately off, and kept one servant. She herself instructed me in the rudiments of education: I was fond of learning, and progressed rapidly under her supervision. She was indeed very kind to me—behaving with all the affection of a near and fond relative. When I was about eight years old—I remember the incident as well as if it had only occurred yesterday—Mrs. Burnaby told me that she was going upon a little journey, that she might be absent a couple of days, and that I was to be a very good girl and mind what the female-servant said during her absence. She did remain away two days: and it was late in the evening when she returned. She was accompanied by a nurse carrying a little baby; and she told me that this little baby was my brother. I was too young to reflect upon such matters at that time; and therefore I did not think it at all extraordinary. Indeed, all my feelings were those of an enthusiastic joy at having this little brother. It was a wet-nurse who had charge of him; and I was told that his name was Francis. At the expiration of some months—I suppose nine or ten—the wet-nurse went away; and a girl from the neighbourhood was hired to take charge of little Frank. He throve apace; and when he was able to run alone he became a companion for me. Full well do I remember the childish delight with which I used to lead him when we walked out with Mrs. Burnaby or the nurse-maid; and as years went by and he became more companionable for me still, I loved him with the sincerest affection. He was not a strong nor healthy child, but delicate and interesting—endowed with that remarkable beauty which has accompanied his growth and which characterizes him now. I myself, on the other hand, was a strong vigorous girl—tall for my age—and totally unacquainted with even a day's indisposition. When Frank was old enough to commence learning, Mrs. Burnaby instructed him as she did me; and it gave me the sincerest delight to assist my little brother in his lessons.

"Time wore on—and the incident I am about to relate happened in the year 1832. I was then fourteen, and Frank was six. One morning Mrs. Burnaby told us that we were to be dressed in our Sunday apparel, and accompany her on a little journey. Presently a vehicle, which had been ordered from Edmonton, drove up to the door: we entered it, and proceeded to some village about ten miles distant—but I did not know the name. There we stopped at a tavern, where a splendid carriage, attended by servants in a gorgeous livery, was waiting. Mrs. Burnaby, myself, and Frank took our places in this carriage; and it drove away. Speedily turning out of the main road, it entered a bye-one, running through some beautiful sylvan scenery. At the expiration of an hour a superb mansion appeared at a little distance. It was situated upon a gentle eminence, in the middle of a park, where numerous deer were frisking about. It was a beautiful day in the middle of summer: the trees and fields were of the liveliest green—the ornamental waters in that park reflected the unclouded blue of heaven—and swans were floating in stately gracefulness upon the limpid lake. Altogether it was a scene which delighted me at the time, and made an indelible impression upon me. Through this park did the carriage proceed, until it drove up to the entrance of the mansion, where it stopped. Mrs. Burnaby alighted with us: an elderly female, looking like a housekeeper, received us as we descended from the vehicle: and a kind greeting took place between her and Mrs. Burnaby. They were evidently old acquaintances. The housekeeper—for so I shall call her—bestowed great attention on Frank and me, and seemed surprised that I should have grown such a tall girl. Perhaps she paid me some little compliments with an admiring good-nature: but these I pass over. We were conducted up a magnificent staircase, to a bed-chamber, where a lady lay ill in the couch. She was very beautiful, though pale with sickness: she appeared to be about thirty-three years of age. There were two other ladies with her, much younger than herself—one being but little past twenty, and the other nineteen. I do not think they were sisters—for although they were both very beautiful, there was no family resemblance between them. Nor do I think they were any relation to the lady who was ill—at least so far as I could judge by the way in which they addressed her. I must however observe that neither the invalid lady nor these two younger ones called each other by any name the whole time that Frank and I were there—this reserve being doubtless a necessary but melancholy precaution to prevent us from obtaining any clue as to who they were.

"The sick lady embraced me and Frank with the utmost tenderness, and wept over us. She contemplated us with a look which I can never forget—a look of mournful fondness and sorrowing love—a look which, young though I was, nevertheless made me think that there must be some secret tie connecting my brother and myself with this lady. After remaining upwards of an hour with her, she bade us a most affectionate farewell. She gave me some advice as to my future conduct, and hinted that I was shortly to be removed from Mrs. Burnaby's and placed at school: but she assured me that I had friends in the world who would ever be watchful over my interests. Again and again did she press me and Frank to her bosom; and although I have no doubt she exerted all her energies to restrain her emotions as much as possible, yet she could not prevent them from finding an issue. Mrs. Barnaby and the housekeeper conducted us back to the carriage; and the latter female kissed us both most kindly at parting. I should observe that the two young ladies already mentioned, had likewise lavished affectionate endearments upon us. The handsome carriage took us back to the village, where we entered the hired vehicle and were borne home to the cottage.

"On the following day preparations were commenced towards fitting me out for a boarding-school. I grieved sadly when I found that I was to be separated from my dearly beloved brother: but Mrs. Burnaby consoled me with the assurance that when he was old enough he should join me in the same establishment. At the expiration of eight or ten days, the housekeeper from that splendid mansion arrived at the cottage. The moment of parting had now come; and full well do I remember the bitter, bitter tears I shed when separating from Frank and Mrs. Burnaby. The housekeeper took me into London in a hired vehicle; and thence

we proceeded by coach to Southampton. There I was placed at the establishment of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings. It was a very large one, and was divided into two distinct compartments—one for boys, and one for girls,—the master presiding over the former, and the mistress over the latter. There it was that the housekeeper left me, kissing me affectionately when she went away, and giving me a well-filled purse for pocket-money. I was well treated at this school: that is to say, I experienced no unkindness. But I need scarcely observe that I very much missed the tender care of her whom I had been taught to believe was my grandmother. Mrs. Burnaby frequently wrote kind and encouraging letters to me, and occasionally sent me little presents. I expected to go home to her at the holidays, and was sadly distressed when I was informed that I must remain at school. I wrote to Mrs. Burnaby imploring her to have me home, and telling her how much I longed to see my dear brother Frank. She wrote me back a letter full of kindness, but assuring me that circumstances compelled her to keep me at school, and enjoining me to make myself as happy as I possibly could. Frank sometimes wrote in his own little way; and I remember how I used to weep over those letters. Ah, I had been told to make myself happy—but I could not; and during the holidays, when most of the other children were away at their homes, I often used to weep and sob as if my heart would break.

"At the expiration of very nearly two years, I was one day most agreeably surprised by the presence of my brother. He told me that Mrs. Burnaby was dead, and that she was not our grandmother—indeed that she was no relation at all. He was not dressed in black; and when I spoke to the schoolmistress on the subject, she told me that we were neither of us to be put into mourning. I was much afflicted at hearing of the good old lady's death; and I felt shocked at this prohibition from putting

on a suitable apparel: for notwithstanding I now learnt that there was not the remotest degree of kinship between her and me, yet I thought that having so long regarded her in another light, it would have been but decent to exhibit a proper respect for her memory. Frank told me that a gentleman, whose name he did not know, had brought him to school; and it appeared that this gentleman—or rather nobleman—took his departure immediately, and did not ask to see me.

"Frank likewise told me that about ten months back he had been taken to a large building in London, where he had seen that lady again; and that she was then in perfect health. On that occasion he had for the first time beheld the nobleman who afterwards brought him to school: for that he was a nobleman, could be conjectured from the circumstance that he had worn a star upon his breast, when Frank saw him first of all. My brother likewise told me that on the previous day—that before he arrived at the school, and which was ten months after his visit to the lady at the great building in London—this same nobleman, after taking possession of Mrs. Burnaby's papers and letters, had conducted him to the splendid mansion in the park, where he saw the lady a third time, and also those two young ladies previously mentioned. The lady whom he had been taken specially to see, wept over him, murmuring that perhaps she should never see him more; and she cut off a lock of his hair. He was then consigned to the charge of that nobleman who brought him to the school at Southampton. Such was the substance of the information which Frank gave me; and amidst my grief at the death of poor Mrs. Burnaby, it was a source of comfort to have my brother beneath the same roof with myself.

"At the time of which I am now speaking, he was eight, and I was sixteen. He of course lived in the department of the establishment allotted to the boys—while I dwelt in that appropriated to the female scholars. We however saw each other for a short time every day, and for several hours on Sunday. I was therefore now much happier than I had been when at this school by myself; and I did my best to make my poor brother happy also. We were well provided with clothes by the master and mistress according as we wanted them: and we were likewise allowed a sufficiency of pocket-money. I think that Mr. and Mrs. Jennings suspected there was some strange mystery connected with us—but they evidently were not acquainted with it—or at least not in all its particulars: for Mrs. Jennings frequently questioned me in respect to my former reminiscences. I used to answer her with frankness, in the hope that she would perhaps be led to tell me something. But she never did.

"I must here observe that amongst the female-scholars at this school, there was one named Catherine Marshall. She was four years younger than myself—a fine, tall, well-made, and beautiful creature as ever I beheld. She was possessed of a merry and joyous disposition — innocently mischievous, if I may use the term—and full of frolicsome gaiety. My spirits were naturally good, notwithstanding the many depressing circumstances by which I was surrounded. Kate and I soon formed a sincere friendship for each other. When the school walked out we were always together; we sat together in the school-room; and as she was somewhat idle and disliked learning, I was wont to assist her with her lessons. She was a kind-hearted generous-minded girl; and I loved her dearly. I must add that her father Mr. Marshall kept a tavern at Dover; but being well off, he was enabled to give his daughters a good education. For Kate had two sisters younger than herself; and they were at school, I believe, at Dover—the mother not liking to have them all sent away from home.

"I have said that I was sixteen when my brother came to this school. About a year afterwards Mrs. Jennings told me that I was no longer to consider myself a scholar, but was to occupy the place of junior teacher, with the ultimate view of qualifying myself as a governess, by which profession I was to earn my bread. Thus time passed on; and when I was twenty, Mrs. Jennings informed me that I was to make my preparations to enter, in the above capacity, a family that was about to visit the Continent. Kate Marshall at that time—she being sixteen—left the school. We exchanged some little mementoes of our friendship; and she made me promise that if ever I had an opportunity, I would pay her a visit at Dover. But the most anguished separation was from my dear brother Frank; and when the moment for parting came, we embraced again and again, unable to tear ourselves away from each other's arms. At length we did separate: and never shall I forget the excruciating poignancy of my affliction at that moment! My boxes were conveyed to the hotel where the family was stopping: but before I took leave of Mr. and Mrs. Jennings, I besought them to treat my dear brother with all possible kindness, as I knew that he would be inconsolable at my loss. They promised that they would; and they showed some degree of feeling on parting from me.

"The family into which I now entered was that of Sir John Marston. He was then about fifty years of age: Lady Marston was two years his junior. They had a niece with them—a Mrs. Lloyd—who was a widow, and had two children. She was about thirty years old; and her children—both girls—were respectively twelve and ten. It was these two children of whose education I was to take charge. As I have already said, this family was staying at an hotel; and from what I learnt, they had only arrived from London two days previously. How they heard of me—how I became engaged to enter into their service—how long the negotiation had been carried on—in short, all circumstances leading to my entrance into this family, were totally unknown to me; and of course I did not ask the question.

"On the following day we embarked on board a steam-packet bound for Havre-de-Grace: and there I found that the Marstons had a house ready provided to receive them, and where they had previously been dwelling for some time. It was there that we accordingly took up our abode; and I entered upon my duties as governess to Mrs. Lloyd's children. Under no circumstances is the occupation of a teacher a very pleasurable one: but mine was rendered doubly annoying by the disagreeable temper of my two pupils, and by the difficulty I experienced in giving Mrs. Lloyd satisfaction. She was constantly interfering and finding fault. Her children were rude, pert, and forward when I commenced with them; and vainly did I endeavour to improve their manners and dispositions. If I spoke

harshly to them, they raised such a storm of crying, shrieking, screaming, and yelling, that the whole house grew alarmed, and I was blamed for their ill-conduct. In short, I soon found that I had entered into a kind of purgatory, and that the life I had led at the Southampton school was paradise compared to it. Sir John Marston often scolded me most brutally: Lady Marston treated me with the supremest contempt: indeed, she was kinder far to her menials than to myself. Mrs. Lloyd, as I have already said, was constantly finding fault. If I corrected the children when they did wrong—or if I let them have their own way—I was equally liable to blame; and thus I found my situation rapidly becoming intolerable. The domestics, seeing how I was treated by their master and the two ladies, followed their example; so that I could scarcely get even the most necessary services performed, and had to a great extent to do menial things for myself. I wrote frequently to Frank: but I never in my letters mentioned to him how thoroughly unhappy I was.

"Thus some months passed away; and at length, as my ideas began to grow enlarged and my experience of the world increased, I began to ask myself why I should put up with so much ill-treatment? I reasoned that if my qualifications were such as to enable me to obtain my bread at all, they would avail for the purpose in some other family than Sir John Marston's; and inspired by these reflections, I felt a certain independence of spirit growing up within me. When once this spirit had sprung into existence—or rather, when the natural strength of my mind began thus to develop itself—I assumed a loftier bearing towards those around me. One day, when the children had been guilty of some exceeding act of rudeness, I chastised them with great severity. Their cries brought up their mother Mrs. Lloyd; and she began abusing me with her usual violence. I desired her not to address me in such language—told her that she was no lady, but only fit for a fishwife—and gave her plainly and frankly to understand that so long as I had the charge of her daughters, I was thenceforth determined to punish them whenever they deserved it. She hastened away to tell her uncle Sir John Marston, who rushed up to the nursery furious with rage. When he began storming at me, I told him he was a cowardly bully, and that he would not dare behave thus to one of his own sex. He blustered and fumed, endeavouring to break my spirit; and he even raised his hand to strike me—when I snatched up a footstool and hurled it at his head. It struck him a severe blow, but tranquillized him in a moment; and he quitted the nursery without another word. Thus far I was victorious. But presently I had to encounter the self-sufficient insolence of Lady Marston; for as I passed her on the stairs, she turned up her nose, muttering something about 'a beggarly upstart.' I at once told her that I had not the slightest doubt she was precisely what she had dared to call me; and white with rage, she hurried away. I was now perfectly triumphant. I felt glowing within me a spirit such as I had never known before; and the consciousness that I possessed it, made me happy. I suddenly felt myself above all petty tyrannies, and totally independent of my tyrants. I was therefore encouraged to prosecute the warfare against the servants; and when that very same day an impertinent minx of a housemaid refused to do something I bade her, I bestowed upon her such a sound box on the ears, that she was as much dismayed as hurt. She did not any longer refuse to follow my orders: and during all the rest of the time I was in Sir John Marston's family, I experienced no overt impertinence on the part of the domestics.

"The effect which all these various proceedings produced, was perfectly astonishing: the treatment I subsequently experienced was widely different from that I had before known. I was left to manage the children as I thought fit; and the domestics obeyed my orders. But still I was resolved to take the earliest opportunity of quitting a situation which I disliked and a family that I detested. I secretly made inquiries if other English families living in Havre, required a governess—but could hear of nothing satisfactory. At length I resolved to give Sir John Marston notice to leave him, and wend my way back to England. Thereupon he gave me to understand that I was bound to him by those who had the power to bind me, until I should attain the age of twenty-one. It only wanted three months of that period; and I therefore determined to await it patiently. But still I wondered who the persons could be that exercised this invisible but powerful influence over my destinies.

"About two months after that conversation with Sir John Marston the family removed from Havre to Paris; and we took up our abode at an hotel, the Baronet alleging that he purposed to look out for a suitable residence, as he meant to fix himself permanently, or at all events for some time, in the French capital. I cared nothing about his arrangements—looking forward to the end of another month as the period of my emancipation. And now I come to the most extraordinary incident in my chequered life. It was on the morning after the attainment of my twenty-first year, that I requested an interview with Sir John Marston in order to receive whatsoever amount of money was due to me and take my leave. The request for an audience was granted; and when I repaired to the room in which he was seated alone, he manifested the most extraordinary courtesy. Desiring me to be seated, he addressed me in such a tone of urbanity and kindness that I could scarcely believe he was the same individual who used to treat me with such ruffian brutality. He commenced by stating that he was sorry if any past circumstances had rendered me unhappy while in his family, but attributed them all to hastiness of temper—for which he professed a profound sorrow. He then questioned me—as indeed he had often done before—very minutely relative to my reminiscences of the earlier portion of my life; and thinking that now I had attained my majority, and was going to leave him, he might have something important to communicate, I spoke without reserve. He then proceeded to make me the most extraordinary proposal; and although he opened his mind with cautious slowness—feeling his way as it were with the most wary circumlocution—yet the proposition, when fully developed, struck me speechless with wonder for some minutes. It was to the effect that if I would consent to marry a certain person whom he had selected, he would present me with a sum of five thousand pounds; but that he did not require

me to live with this husband of his choice a day, nor an hour, nor a minute. On the contrary, he stipulated as a part of his proposition, that we were to separate immediately after the ceremony and see each other no more. When I had recovered from the astonishment into which this proposal had thrown me, I speedily reflected that it was one which, singular and indelicate though it appeared, I should nevetheless do well to accept. To a person who was about to leave a situation with only a few pounds in her pocket, and utterly uncertain how soon she could procure another—without any known friends, too, in the whole wide world—the offer of five thousand pounds was magnificently tempting. Indeed, it was a temptation too brilliant and dazzling to be refused. I therefore speedily made up my mind to accept the offer. But having no very high opinion of Sir John Marston's integrity, I insisted upon receiving the money before I would conclude the strange bargain. He told me that the moment the ceremony was over I should have to sign a certain paper without reading its contents, and that the object which he had in view would not be answered unless I affixed my name to that document. He therefore proposed that immediately after the ceremony and previous to the signing of the paper, the money should be placed in my hands. To this I consented; and Sir John Marston then told me that in a couple of hours the bridegroom would be there. I returned to my own chamber, and he immediately issued from the hotel.

"When I was alone—the children being at the time with their mother Mrs. Lloyd—I reflected upon the step I was about to take. That Sir John Marston had some deep selfish purpose to serve, there could be no doubt: but what it was, seemed impossible for me to fathom. If I rejected his proposal, how should I better myself? If a large sum of money were due to me, and he only meant to pay me a part, what measures could I take for obtaining the whole? where was I to look for the source of such money? to whom was I to address myself for information or complaint? I was profoundly anxious to escape from the thraldom of a governess's life; and here was a little fortune within my reach. All things considered, and all the circumstances being well weighed, I resolved to persevere. Thus making up my mind with coolness and firmness, I maintained a remarkable equanimity of mind,—experiencing no nervousness, nor anxiety, nor excitement. I looked upon the whole affair as a purely business-transaction, and was prepared to go through with it in that sense.

"It was a little after nine o'clock in the morning when the interview between me and Sir John Marston had occurred: it was about half-past eleven when Lady Marston and Mrs. Lloyd entered my chamber and bade me accompany them to another room. They knew what was about to take place, and spoke to me encouragingly on the subject. They were evidently fearful that I should retract my promise: and they addressed me in terms sickeningly fawning and coaxing. I gave them to understand that I required no such show of false friendship on their part—that I had made up my mind how to act, in order to serve my own views—and that if by so doing I served their's at the same time, it was through no love that I bore them. Soon afterwards Sir John Marston made his appearance, accompanied by a very handsome young Frenchman who spoke English perfectly, and whom he introduced to me as the Marquis of Villebelle. So I was to become a Marchioness! This did not however flatter my pride in the slightest degree: for I cared nothing about artificial rank and the nauseating blazonry of titles. Nor did the agreeable person of the young Marquis produce any tender impression upon my heart; and notwithstanding his good looks, his graceful bearing, and his elegant manners, I remained perfectly willing to carry out the Baronet's conditions to their utmost limit, and separate from my intended husband the moment the ceremony should have been performed. Besides, I should have loathed myself if all in a moment I could have made up my mind to fall into the arms of a man whom I had never seen before, and whom therefore I had not been led to love.

"Well, to proceed with my narrative. No preparations in the shape of apparel were made for this singular wedding. The white veil, the virgin dress, the orange blossoms, and the bouquet, were all wanting. I was well but plainly attired, and with no one single indication that I was about to become a bride. Indeed, the other inmates of the hotel remained in perfect ignorance that any such ceremony was contemplated. Sir John and Lady Marston, Mrs. Lloyd, the Marquis of Villebelle, and myself, entered a carriage hired for the occasion, and proceeded to the British Embassy, where my hand was duly united in marriage to that of the French nobleman. The chaplain, who solemnized the rite, gave me a certificate, which I secured about my person. We then returned to the carriage, and drove back to the hotel. There I at once took leave of the Marquis, and repaired to the room where Sir John Marston and I had held the conversation three hours back. In about twenty minutes he joined me, accompanied by an elderly French gentleman, dressed in black, and whom he introduced to me as a Notary Public. This functionary produced several papers, and requested me to show him the marriage certificate. I did so: whereupon he filled up a couple of papers attesting that this certificate had been exhibited to him; and one of these duplicates he handed to me, bidding me keep it. He then produced another document, of which he likewise had a duplicate, and which set forth that for certain reasons of a delicate character, known only to the persons interested, a separation had been agreed upon between my husband and myself,—I retaining all rights over whatsoever property I might be entitled to. These papers I had to sign; and one of them was also left in my possession. Next the notary produced a still more elaborate document, and then Sir John Marston, interposing, said in French that 'the Marchioness of Villebelle was already acquainted with its contents, and it was not necessary to read it.' I was very much inclined to demur to this: but Sir John threw upon me a look which seemed to say that I was completely in his power as to the five thousand pounds; and not knowing but that I might have really been so—and indeed more than half fancying I was—I held my peace. Thereupon Sir John drew forth his pocket-book, counted down the amount of five thousand pounds in French bank-notes, and placed them near me. I signed the document, over which a large piece of blotting-paper was thrown so that I could not catch

the slightest glimpse of its contents: for I have no doubt that the notary was secretly in the Baronet's pay, bribed to manage the business thus cautiously. I should observe that all the documents were in the French language, with which I am perfectly acquainted. The notary then took his departure; and I possessed myself of my five thousand pounds.

"I now intimated to Sir John Marston that I was about to quit his family at once—to which he made no objection. But he bade me wait a few minutes while he gave me a word of caution. This was to the effect that if I consulted my own interests I should do well not to mention to any persons whose friendship I might thereafter form, the peculiar circumstances under which my marriage was contracted; and he even hinted that some fraud had been committed, in which I was more or less an accomplice. I began to grow frightened: for it did not occur to me at the time that this might be merely a device on his part to intimidate me into secrecy. He however assured me that I should be perfectly safe, provided I kept my own counsel; and he farther intimated that if ever I wished to communicate with him, and should be unacquainted with his address, a letter directed to him through his English attorney, Mr. Robson, of Saville Row, London, would reach him. He told me that he had changed his mind about settling himself in Paris, and that he purposed to travel about on the Continent for some time to come. I now took leave of him. He gave me his hand at parting, and hoped that I experienced no lingering ill-will towards him. I said frankly enough that I had little cause to entertain a friendly feeling, but that as for a permanent rancour, mine was not a disposition to cherish it. On leaving Sir John, I proceeded to my own chamber to finish my arrangements for departure; and while I was thus occupied, Lady Marston and Mrs. Lloyd came to bid me farewell. I treated them precisely as I had Sir John; and having taken leave of the two girls, I entered a hackney-coach, ordering the driver to take me to another hotel. I however purposed that my stay there should be brief, inasmuch as I resolved to set off on the following day on my return to England: for I longed to embrace my brother Frank.

"I have already stated that since I left Southampton, I regularly corresponded with him. A year had now elapsed since I left him there; and by the last letter I received, I knew he was still at the seminary. I sent to make inquiries relative to the hour at which the diligence started for Havre on the following morning; and while the porter of the hotel was gone, I began to ruminate seriously upon my position. There was I, a young and unprotected woman — only twenty-one years of age, and just launched, so to speak, upon the wide world! I could not marry, even if I should meet with any one to gain my affections; and I felt that at my age, and not being particularly bad-looking, I should find myself exposed to offers and overtures alike honourable and dishonourable. I was prepared to accept neither; but I naturally shrank from the chance of encountering them. It therefore occurred to me that if I passed as a married woman, there would be in that title a certain protection for myself and a safeguard for my reputation. But I did not choose to adopt my husband's name, or receive the reflection of his rank. I scorned and hated the marriage, on account of the circumstances attending it; and I despised aristocratic distinctions. I therefore resolved to remain a plain civilian; and I deliberated what name I should take: for if passing as a married woman, I could not of course retain my maiden name of *Paton*. On the table in my room at the hotel to which I had removed, were some English novels, placed there for the use of those guests who chose to avail themselves of such reading. I thought to myself that I would leave my future name to a sort of lottery; and taking up one of the volumes, I determined to adopt the first name that should meet my eye, if it were not an ugly one. In this manner did I come to dub myself *Mrs. Chandos*. It was by this name that I now had my passport made out; and on the following morning, at nine o'clock, I took my place in the *coupé* of the diligence for Havre. This compartment of a French stage-coach is made for three persons; and my two companions were elderly French ladies who were also going to Havre. I was well pleased with their companionship; for they were very agreeable persons;—and the day passed quickly enough, notwithstanding the tediousness of travelling by diligence on the Continent.

"It was in the middle of the night, and while we were still at a considerable distance from Havre-de-Grace, that the diligence was suddenly attacked by a body of armed robbers, who were so numerous and so formidable that resistance on the part of the male passengers, the guard, or the postilions, was out of the question. It was in a lonely spot where the deed took place; and the banditti went to work in a most deliberate manner. They unpacked all the boxes to search for money, jewellery, or other valuables; and my five thousand pounds, which I had deposited inside my trunk, was appropriated by the plunderers. In short they carried off everything worth taking from all the passengers—purses, watches, even to the very ear-rings of the females. The two elderly ladies who were my companions, were terribly frightened; but I retained my presence of mind: for although deeply annoyed and afflicted by the loss of my money, yet I saw that no attempt would be made upon our lives. When the robbers had done their work, they suffered the diligence to proceed; and in the morning I thus arrived absolutely penniless at Havre."

CHAPTER LXXXI.

CONTINUATION OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"I TOOK up my quarters at an hotel, and reflected upon what course I should now pursue. I learnt on inquiry that there would be no steam-packet for Southampton for the next two days; but even if there were, and if by parting with some of my clothes I could raise money enough to pay my fare, what was the use of presenting myself in a pauperized condition to my poor brother? I knew that he had no funds wherewith to assist me: and moreover, I shrank from the idea of afflicting him by an account of my misfortunes. What was I to do? My position was most embarrassing. I did not however suffer myself to be completely cast down: the same spirit which had

animated me in dealing with the petty tyrants of the family which I had so recently left, inspired me now with courage to meet my misfortunes. At first I thought of writing at once to Sir John Marston, telling him how I was situated and requesting his pecuniary assistance. But when I reflected on the independent manner in which I had left him, my soul recoiled from the idea of such self-humiliation. The only course open to me appeared to be that of obtaining a situation as a governess; and this I thought would not be so very difficult, as there were many English residents in Havre, as well as respectable French tradesmen, who knew that I had been a year with Sir John Marston's family. I accordingly set about instituting immediate inquiries. The robbery of the diligence was of course generally known in Havre; and it being likewise known that I was one of the victims, my position excited some degree of sympathy. An English lady, named Knight, who had recently been left a widow, and had several children, was staying at Havre at the time; and she offered to receive me as a governess. She frankly told me that she was not very well off, and that she could not afford to give me a handsome salary: but my circumstances did not permit me to be over particular—and I therefore accepted her proposition. She was a woman of about forty: her eldest son, whose christian name was James, was just one-and-twenty; and she had four other children—two boys and two girls, whose ages ranged from ten to eighteen. She was a good-natured person — somewhat weak-minded — and entirely under the empire of her son James, who, I must observe, was a handsome young man. Her husband had been dead about eight months: he was a merchant—but had left his circumstances in a less flourishing condition than had been expected from his mode of life. He had some little property at Barcelona in Spain: and it required the widow's presence there for her to take possession of it. She had arrived from England on her way thither; and as I found, more from compassion in respect to myself than because her views were sufficiently settled to enable her to engage a governess at the time, she received me into her family. In a few weeks we set off by the diligence towards the Spanish frontier. I soon found that James Knight had taken it into his head to make a conquest of me, if possible—and not in an honourable way. When unperceived by his mother, he besieged me with attentions; and even in her presence he sometimes looked and spoke in a manner that it was impossible to misunderstand. On these occasions I saw that she reproved him with a glance, for which however he cared but little. She was however soon satisfied that he received no encouragement from me: for I gave him to understand as plainly as I could that his attentions were most disagreeable. But he persevered in them: and on one occasion it became necessary for me to resent his impertinence with a sound box on the ears, which I hesitated not to bestow. He was of an evil disposition — treacherous, malignant, and spiteful to a degree; and finding that so far from making any tender impression on me, I treated him in this manner, he menaced me with his looks. For these however I cared but little; and deported myself towards him with aversion and contempt. He grew sullen and morose; and I saw full well that he had conceived a bitter hatred against me. Under these circumstances was it that we arrived at Barcelona. I do not pause to say anything particular relative to the children entrusted to my charge, as I remained so short a time with Mrs. Knight: but I now come to the incident which caused me to leave her abruptly. On arriving at Barcelona, we took up our quarters at an hotel preparatory to the hiring of suitable apartments during the period that it would be requisite for Mrs. Knight to remain in that city. The very day after our arrival, and at about eight o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Knight discovered that some articles of jewellery had been abstracted from her trunk. This announcement was made in the presence of her son James; and he immediately turned towards me, asking with a malignant look 'what I was doing in his mother's chamber about an hour back?' Instantaneously understanding the nature of the aspersion he intended to throw upon me, my indignation burst forth in no measured terms: for it was totally false that I had been to his mother's room at all. He vowed that I had; and insisted that my boxes should be searched. This I at once assented to: whereupon Mrs. Knight, who, poor weak-minded woman, had begun to grow suspicious concerning me, led the way to my chamber, followed by her son and myself. On our way thither, the thought—the terrible thought, flashed to my mind that if James Knight were villain enough to accuse me thus wrongfully, he was also sufficiently treacherous and malignant to have placed the jewels in my box in order to ruin me. I beheld at a glance all the danger of my position; and in the swift brief moments that were passing, I revolved in my mind the two alternatives that lay before me —either to dare the accusation boldly on the one hand,—or to fly from it precipitately on the other. Though perfectly innocent, as God is my judge, yet I chose the latter alternative: for I could not endure the thought of being plunged into a prison. I therefore determined to escape. We entered my chamber; and in order to throw the treacherous young man entirely off his guard with respect to my intention, I affected not to entertain the slightest suspicion that the jewels would really be found in my box. I was thus enabled, when he was busily engaged in turning out all the things, to snatch up a bonnet and shawl and glide from the room. Locking the door upon Mrs. Knight and her son, I slipped on the bonnet and shawl—reached the staircase—descended it rapidly—and issued forth from the hotel. It was now dusk; and I sped precipitately along the street—gained the postern—passed the fortifications without hindrance—and was soon on the wide open plain stretching towards the Catalonian Hills. I proceeded onward with but little relaxation of speed for nearly two hours,—when I was compelled to sit down and rest. It was now a beautiful moonlit night; and I could see to a considerable distance. Three or four habitations were discernible amidst the sylvan scenery which formed a large portion of the landscape: but I dared not seek shelter at any of these, for fear that if information had been given to the Barcelonese police, the entire neighbourhood might be scoured by those officers and I should be arrested. I therefore resolved to walk onward throughout the whole night, and thus place as great a distance as possible between myself and the city which I had left.

"Having rested as long as I dared, I pursued my way again. I had purposely stricken out of the main road, and was plunging deeper and deeper into the wilds and fastnesses of Catalonia. I had read of the generous disposition and high-minded nature of the Catalans—and resolved, when morning dawned, and I had travelled far enough to be beyond the reach of pursuit, to stop at some cottage and ask for food and shelter: for I had a little money in my pocket, which I had received from Mrs. Knight. My spirits did not flag: indeed there was something wildly romantic and exhilarating in this journey, amidst the bold and striking scenery which the powerful effulgence of moon and stars brought out in strong relief. It must not be however thought that I was indifferent to the suspicion of guilt in respect to the jewels, which would be naturally confirmed by my precipitate flight: but I resolved, so soon as I should have an opportunity, to write a letter containing the requisite explanations to Mrs. Knight, showing the infamous conduct of her son and how I had fled as the only alternative to escape a prison.

"I pressed courageously forward, stopping every now and then to sit down upon a stone or a bank, but gallantly battling against increasing fatigue. Thus I continued my way till morning dawned; and now I was in the midst of all the characteristic scenery of the immense principality of Catalonia. Barren rocks and fertile valleys—groves of cork trees—cascades and torrents—limpid streamlets and roaring waterfalls—these were the principal features which nature presented to my view. When the sun was rising over the orient hills, I sat down upon the slope of an eminence, now no longer able to combat against the sense of fatigue. A smiling valley, intersected with a rivulet, spread itself out at my feet; and behind me the wild barren hills rose in amphitheatrical grandeur. Not a habitation was to be seen. I had frequently slaked my thirst during the night's wanderings; for there had been no lack of springs and rivulets in the path which I had pursued: but I was now tortured with the gnawing pangs of hunger—and the dread apprehension began to creep shudderingly over me, that it was possible for me to starve amidst these Catalonian wilds. My hope that I should reach some hospitable cottage, appeared to be disappointed; and I felt that I must rest some hours before I could resume my wanderings with ease or speed. While I was thus giving way to the disagreeable reflections that began to steal over me, I heard footsteps suddenly approaching from behind, and starting up, I beheld a figure that I must describe. It was that of a man at least six feet high, symmetrically but strongly built, his form being alike muscular and elegant. He appeared to be about thirty years of age, and was perhaps one of the handsomest men I had ever seen in my whole life. His complexion, naturally of Spanish swarthiness, was more deeply bronzed by exposure to the scorching sun; but it had an olive clearness through which the warm blood could mantle upon that fine countenance. His eyes were dark, but full of fire—looking like jet that burns without losing its sable hue. His features were of the purely Grecian cast: and his teeth were truly splendid. His long black hair, the least thing coarse—but glossy and curling naturally, and of remarkable luxuriance—fell upon his shoulders. He wore a moustache, but neither beard nor whiskers, and thus appeared even younger than he really was. He was dressed in the picturesque Catalan costume, and carried a rifle in his hand. His belt was furnished with pistols and daggers; and by his side hung a straight sword of immense length. He might either have been a guerilla or a bandit chief—I knew not which at the moment: but I strongly suspected the latter.

"I must here observe that this was the middle of September, 1839; and the Carlist war was just concluded. Don Carlos had passed with the bulk of his army into France: but Cabrera, one of his most famous generals, still continued in Spain at the head of a large body of troops. He was not however at that time in Catalonia—but I believe in the Basque Provinces; while Catalonia itself had become almost completely pacified. The Catalan whom I have described, and whom I thus encountered at sunrise in the midst of his own native wilds, stood gazing upon me for upwards of a minute in speechless astonishment. And no wonder that such should have been his feeling: for I doubtless appeared to him like a person dropped from the clouds in that lonely region. But blended with his look of surprise was an expression of admiration: and suspecting that I was not a Spanish woman, he at length addressed me in the French tongue. He spoke with mildness and courtesy, asking me whether I had not lost my way, and whether he could be of any assistance to me? I replied frankly that I had wandered the whole night—that I was exhausted with fatigue and famished with hunger—and that I required both repose and refreshment. Without asking another question, he courteously invited me to accompany him, assuring me of kind treatment. I showed by my looks and manner that I put confidence in him; and he led the way up the eminence, until we reached a winding path which descended somewhat precipitately between two walls of rock, which grew higher and higher in proportion as we went lower and lower. The path continued its tortuous way almost completely round the hill, until it reached a valley on the opposite side; and there I beheld a little encampment, consisting of half-a-dozen tents pitched upon the bank of a streamlet. A fire was burning in the open air, and over it a cauldron was suspended in the true gipsy fashion. A dozen men, dressed and armed in a manner similar to the individual who was guiding me thither, were lounging about, most of them smoking; and four or five women, in the picturesque Catalan attire, added to the interest of the scene. These women were young and beautiful: the men were all fine athletic fellows, and the age of none appeared to exceed forty. I immediately became the object of curiosity and attention on the part of these persons: but the curiosity partook not of rudeness, while the attention was courteous and kind. Two of the young women spoke French; and thus I was enabled to understand what they said. I may here at once observe—what I did not discover till later in the day—that the individual who had brought me thither, was the chief of this band, and was styled Don Diego Christoval; but what the occupations of the band itself were, I did not so speedily ascertain. Don Christoval bade the women bustle about and supply me with refreshments. I was introduced

into one of the tents, where bedding was stretched upon the ground; and there the two women who spoke French, desired me to repose myself. This invitation I gratefully accepted. Hot coffee, eggs, biscuits, and butter, together with some cold meat, was speedily served up; and I made a copious meal. The women then bade me rest myself as long as I thought fit,—promising that I should not be disturbed, for that the encampment would remain in that spot for some days. I thanked them for their kindness; and they left me, closing the canvass of the tent over the entrance.

"I slept soundly for several hours. Indeed, it was not till late in the afternoon that I awoke; and then I was completely refreshed. Presently the handsome countenance of one of the women peeped into the tent; and perceiving that I was awake, she pointed to certain arrangements which she had made for my comfort while I had been steeped in slumber. On a rudely constructed table all the necessary materials for ablutions and the toilet were spread; and as these details are not without their interest, I may add that I found a hair-brush, a comb, nail and tooth brushes, all completely new, together with fragrant Barcelonese soap, and perfumed oil for the hair. There was likewise a change of linen; and, in short, every care had been taken to minister to my wants and comforts. All this was cheering enough; and I could not help feeling rejoiced at having fallen into such comfortable quarters. The young woman, whose name was Isabella, assisted me in my toilet; and when it was completed, she invited me to join the rest in partaking of the afternoon meal. On issuing forth from the tent, I found a complete banquet spread upon the grass—the whole arrangements having the air of an English pic-nic. There were roast capons, masses of smoked ham, piles of sausages, huge pieces of cheese, vegetables, bread, biscuits, and quantities of grapes and other fruits. The cauldron was again simmering over the fire; and this huge iron vessel contained the favourite Spanish comestible, called *pochero*—a sort of soup with quantities of various kinds of meat, poultry, and game. Plates, dishes, and all the requisite articles of crockery and cutlery were likewise at hand; and there was no deficiency of wine and spirits. The men and women of the band were already seated at the banquet, which they had not however commenced, courteously waiting for my appearance. Don Diego Christoval, rising up from the grass, doffed his cap in graceful salutation; and taking me by the hand, invited me to place myself next to him. We accordingly sat down—and the festival commenced. But little conversation took place during the repast, every one having an appetite so keen as to cause ample justice to be done to the good things above enumerated. When it was over, the men lighted their pipes, and lounging upon the grass, smoked and drank at their ease: but Don Diego, who, it appeared, was not addicted to the use of tobacco, proposed to me, if I were not still too much fatigued, to walk with him along the bank of the streamlet. Supposing that he wished to speak to me relative to my circumstances, I accepted the invitation, and we rambled away from the encampment.

"At first he expressed a hope that I was satisfied with the attention shown me, and that I had found everything as comfortable as, considering the limited and rude nature of the arrangements, I could have expected. When I had given a suitable response, declaring my gratitude for the treatment I had received, he intimated that if I thought fit to give any explanation relative to the circumstances which had brought me into those wilds, he was prepared to listen: but he at the same time, with much mingled frankness and delicacy, assured me that if I preferred remaining silent upon the subject, he would not press me, nor should my treatment undergo any change so long as I might choose to remain with the band. I did not think fit to enter into full particulars relative to the jewels; but I gave him to understand that I had fled precipitately from Barcelona in order to escape a cruel persecution at the hands of the son of a lady in whose family I had occupied the position of a governess. Don Diego was perfectly satisfied with this explanation; and he asked what he could do to serve me? I replied that my object was to return to France. He said that it was his intention to remain for a few days in the present neighbourhood, but that afterwards he and his band would be pushing their way towards the Pyrenees; and that if I thought fit to remain with them during this short interval, he would himself conduct me across the Pyrenean boundary into France. I accepted this offer at once, and for several reasons. In the first place, I had not sufficient money to travel by any public conveyance; and I did not like to expose my necessitous position to Don Diego, or receive pecuniary assistance from him. In the second place, even if I had possessed ample funds, I should not have liked to trust myself to a public conveyance: for I knew not to what extent James Knight's malignity might have reached, and I thought it quite probable that he would give such publicity to the incident of the jewels that should lead to my arrest, if from a personal description I chanced to be recognized. Moreover, it would be impossible to travel without a passport; and mine would betray me to the authorities as the fugitive governess from Barcelona, supposing that James Knight had really made the matter public. In the third place, I was sufficiently interested in my new companions to entertain the wish of beholding somewhat more of their mode of life, in which there was a certain romantic charm for such a disposition as mine. These were the principal motives that at once prompted me to accept Christoval's proposal that I should remain for a few days with his band.

"A week thus passed. Every morning at daybreak the men of the band, headed by Don Diego, set out from the encampment, and did not return until late in the afternoon,—when they found the banquet ready prepared for them by the women. These women were the wives, or perhaps the mistresses, of certain members of the band: but neither of them pertained to Don Diego. Their conduct was unexceptionably correct; and if they were not really wives, they at all events behaved with the discretion and decency of married women. When the men returned of a day, they were invariably laden with provisions of all kinds; and I noticed that of an evening, they all assembled in Don Diego's own tent, where they remained for about half-an-hour, either in consultation or else in dividing other things which they had obtained

during the day in addition to the provisions and wine. That this latter business was really the one that occupied them on those occasions, I gradually began to suspect: for I often heard the sounds of chinking gold emanate from the chief's tent. Moreover, I began to notice that the women varied the articles of jewellery which they wore, and which were exceedingly costly and handsome. In short, at the expiration of the week I acquired the certainty that I had fallen in with a horde of banditti. I therefore longed for the fulfilment of Don Diego's promise that he would conduct me into France. But the second week was entered upon, and nothing was said concerning the subject. I continued to receive the kindest attentions; and if I ever offered to assist the women in preparing the repasts, they would not suffer me to do any menial thing. They conceived the utmost friendship for me; and Isabella, the most beautiful of all, was unremitting in her attentions. Two or three times Christoval asked me to walk with him: but his manner was always that of respectful courtesy, mingled however with the evidences of a growing admiration. I found him to be a man of intelligent and cultivated mind. He was well read in Spanish and French literature: his manners were not merely gentlemanly—they were elegant; and his conversation was varied, amusing, and instructive. At the expiration of the second week I took an opportunity of inquiring when he proposed to advance towards the Pyrenees, from which we were about forty miles distant. A cloud immediately gathered upon his countenance; and bending his dark eyes somewhat reproachfully upon me, he asked in a mournful voice if I were anxious to leave those who experienced so much delight and gratification at my presence amongst them? I answered him frankly, that I was anxious to make my way back to England, in order to earn my livelihood by my own industry, instead of being a burden on the

kindness of strangers. He assured me, with impassioned vehemence, that so far from being a burthen, I was the most welcome of guests; and he added that circumstances would compel the band to remain in that same spot for another fortnight, during which he besought me to tarry amongst them. Perceiving that I was embarrassed how to answer, he addressed me gravely in the following manner:—

"'It would be ridiculous, Senora Chandos, to suppose that you do not suspect what we are. I must however, for my own sake, give you some explanations. In me you behold a Spanish nobleman, bearing the rank of Count, and descended from one of the oldest families of Catalonia. But when I inherited my father's title, the family estate was so impoverished that I found myself a man of broken fortunes. I sold all that was left, and joined the cause of Don Carlos, with the rank of Captain in his army. Whether I have conducted myself as a gallant cavalier, is not for me to say: suffice it for my lips to proclaim, that where the fight has ever been thickest, there was I to be found. The recent treachery of Maroto, in signing a capitulation with the Queen's general Espartero, annihilated my royal master's cause. Two alternatives then became present to my contemplation—either to throw down my arms and acknowledge Queen Isabella, or to fly into France. No—there was another course to be pursued; and that was to associate myself with a few men, gallant and desperate as I am, and adopt a wild predatory life such as you behold us leading. The world will doubtless call us banditti—and we are so: but on entering upon this career, solemn oaths were registered amongst us, to the effect that we should never plunder the poor, but only the rich—and that on no occasion should we use unnecessary violence, much less spill human blood. Those were our oaths; and they have become our laws. You now know, Senora, who and what we are, if indeed you were not previously aware of it. Perhaps you tremble lest we live in a constant state of danger: but this is not so. The Queen's troops are still too much occupied in making head against Cabrera, to over-run the wilds of Catalonia for the extermination of such bands as that of which I am the chief: for there are many such bands at present scattered about the mountainous regions of this principality. For years to come may we safely continue our present pursuits. And now, perhaps, you will wonder wherefore instead of adopting this course of life, I have not joined the forces still united under the command of General Cabrera? The explanation can be given in a few words. An insult I received at his hands, and which as a junior officer I could not at the time resent, has engendered so strong a feeling of personal dislike towards that chief, that I could not serve under him.'

"Count Christoval ceased speaking; and I remained wrapped up in deep meditation. His narrative had touched me profoundly: I could not find it in my heart to blame him—scarcely think the worse of him—for having adopted this mode of life. Indeed it was impossible to wonder that he had done so; and I knew, moreover, that these circumstances were invested in the eyes of Spaniards with much less moral degradation and dishonouring taints than in other countries. It was likewise a source of satisfaction and an infinite relief to my mind to learn that I was not the associate of blood-stained murderers—but that these men entertained, after their own fashion, certain notions of a correct and proper nature. I had received so much generous attention and delicate kindness at their hands, as well as on the part of the women, that I could not possibly insist upon quitting them at once without appearing ungrateful for all that hospitable treatment. Therefore, when my meditation was over, I intimated to Don Diego my willingness to abide with his band for another fortnight; but I was somewhat troubled when I beheld the glow of fervid delight and enthusiastic joy which suddenly animated his countenance: for I feared that he entertained towards me a sentiment which I could not possibly reciprocate. He saw that I was thus troubled; and again did the melancholy cloud settle upon his features. Then he hastened to change the conversation, and broke off into a lively strain of discourse, mingled with anecdotes of the late Carlist warfare."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

CONTINUATION OF LADY BESS'S HISTORY.

"The fortnight passed away; and during this interval I avoided as much as possible finding myself alone with Don Diego Christoval. He saw that such was my endeavour; and with a delicacy which I could not help appreciatin , he no longer asked me to join him in his evening ramble, though at meal-times his attentions towards me were most assiduous. When those two additional weeks had expired, I waited anxiously for some word or sign indicative of a removal; and I was well pleased when I heard Don Diego give orders one evening that on the following day we were to set out. Accordingly, at an early hour in the morning, the encampment was broken up: the horses which belonged to the band, and which were kept in an immense cave serving the purpose of a stable, were brought forth. There were steeds enough for us all, women included; and even then there remained a couple to serve as pack-horses for the conveyance of the tents and the baggage. We proceeded slowly, in consequence of the difficult nature of the ground which we had to traverse. I rode at the head, in company with Don Diego; and the time passed rapidly away, thus beguiled by his agreeable conversation. I could see that he loved me—that he entertained, indeed, a profound and adoring passion for me; but I reciprocated it not in the slightest degree. If ever there were a man capable of making an impression on my heart, it was Count Diego Christoval: but I experienced no tender feeling towards him. Even at the time I somewhat wondered at this, making it a subject of self-congratulation; and I thought mine was a heart altogether inaccessible to love—or else that I had never as yet encountered the individual who was to win my affections. Most women, when the term of girlhood is past, form in their own minds the *beau ideal* that they hope to encounter in the course of time, and whom they feel that they can love: but I never indulged in such a dream—I had never thought upon the subject—I had never felt the slightest want to love

or to be loved. Therefore the Spanish bandit fulfilled no preconceived ideal on my part; nor did his handsome person, his elegant manners, or his witching conversation produce a tender impression upon me.

"We proceeded about twenty-five miles that day, and the journey terminated at a half-ruined tower, which stood concealed in the midst of a dense grove of cork-trees. It had been an immense wood; but hostile encounters between the Carlists and Christinos had taken place in that neighbourhood, and large quantities of the trees had been cut down to aid in throwing up defences and to be burnt as firewood. The land round about indicated the scene of battles,—being ploughed up in many directions by artillery and waggons. The blackened remnants of trees, half burnt, lay scattered about; and the horses' feet stumbled over cannon-balls and pieces of broken weapons. The tower itself was situated half-way up an eminence, which was of so peculiar a form as to be inaccessible behind; and thus it served as a background-defence for the building. The cork-trees stretched up to within a few yards of the tower, which they well nigh completely embowered in their verdure. There had been fighting at the tower: and the artillery had played upon the massive edifice, destroying at least half, but leaving the other portion comparatively uninjured.

"There was some furniture in the tower; but the place having been pillaged, everything of value had disappeared. Nevertheless, there were sufficient means of rendering several rooms comfortable enough; and here did the band take up its quarters. One apartment served as a general room where the meals were taken in common, the same as at the encampment; and the others served as bed-chambers. Of these, the best within the tower was allotted to me. On our arrival I was both surprised and apprehensive at finding such pains taken to render the place habitable: for it struck me that so much trouble would scarcely be incurred, if it were intended to pursue the journey on the following day, or even within two or three days. And two or three days did pass without any intimation being given that we were to resume our march towards the Pyrenees. I did not choose to manifest any immediate impatience, because I felt that I had no right to make my own particular objects predominate over the views and interests of Don Diego Christoval and his band. I therefore maintained an outward appearance of cheerfulness, although I began to entertain some misgiving in respect to my position there. In short, I feared that the bandit-chief was doing his best to keep me as long as he possibly could, and that I was virtually a prisoner. For when Christoval and his men went out on their predatory excursions, two of them invariably remained at the tower, ostensibly to act as a guard for the women, but I could not help fancying in reality to prevent my escape. Moreover, when I walked out, one of the women—Isabella generally—accompanied me, and one of the sentinels followed at a distance with the pretext of watching over us. But this had not been done when at the encampment; and I asked myself wherefore such precautions should be held necessary now?

"A week had passed since our arrival at the tower; and there was no sign of a removal. I now purposely sought an opportunity of speaking to the Count. He appeared to understand my wishes; and one day, returning home from the usual excursion much earlier than was his wont, he asked me to accompany him in a walk. It was now the close of October; and the weather was cold. We passed into the wood; and Don Diego speedily approached the subject which I was desirous of reaching. He said, 'I know what is passing in your mind, Senora: you are impatient to leave us—to leave *me*,' he added emphatically; 'and you think I am not behaving honourably or kindly towards you? Now, will you hear me? You are the first woman I ever loved in my life; and you will be the last. The sentiment with which you have smitten me, is a deathless one. Not merely my happiness, but my very life, is in your hands: for if you were to leave me, I could not possibly survive your loss. This love of mine has rendered me desperate—so desperate indeed, that it is making me act with duplicity and unkindness towards you. What is to be my fate? It is in your hands.'

"It was impossible to be angry or indignant with that man: he spoke in language so fervid, and yet so replete with delicate respect—his looks were filled with so much admiration mingled with so much despair—there was altogether such a blending of sincerity, and pathos, and manly appeal in his air his words, and his manner, that I experienced for him a boundless compassion. Knowing that he possessed a generous heart, and certain lofty sentiments of honour, in spite of the lawless kind of life he was leading, I thought to touch and to move him by representing my assumed position as a real and veritable one. I accordingly addressed him in terms of impressive seriousness. I told him that I was a married woman, and was separated from my husband in consequence of the incompatibility of our dispositions; but that inasmuch as I could not on the one hand contract another alliance, I was equally resolute on the other never to lose sight of my honour and good name. The Count looked much distressed, and reflected profoundly. At length he asked if it were impossible I could ever love him? I told him that while I felt deeply grateful for all the kindness I had experienced at his hands—and that although I should ever entertain a friendly remembrance of him—yet that my heart was incapable of experiencing a more tender sentiment. 'To part from you,' he said in a mournful voice, 'will be the same as laying violent hands upon myself: it will be an act of suicide—and I have not the courage to accomplish it. I beseech you to remain at the tower a short time longer. I will not insult myself so far as to assure you that I am incapable of any outrage towards you. If you would consent to live all your life with me as a sister, I should be happy. Mine is no gross and sensual passion: it is pure and ethereal: it is the strangest and most romantic love that ever yet filled the heart of man. So long as I can enjoy the light of your presence—so long as I can hear the music of your voice playing in my ears—so long as I am permitted to gaze upon you from time to time, and dwell upon the beauty of your countenance—therein shall all my ideas of earthly happiness be concentrated. Surely, Senora, such a love as this is not to be lightly repudiated? surely you will take some comparison upon the man who proffers you such a love?'

"I answered that I would speak to him as if it

were a sister addressing a brother; and I went on to represent that for his own sake the sooner we parted the better—that his infatuation would only become the greater, his love the more intimately interwoven with his entire being—that the hour for parting must come at last, sooner or later—and that the longer it was postponed, the more deeply would it be felt by him when it did come. He replied that he was aware of all this—that he had reasoned with himself a thousand times upon the subject during the few past weeks—but that he had not the courage to let me depart. He terminated by conjuring that I would remain one month longer—only one month: that if I consented, he would act precisely in accordance with my wishes—that he would never obtrude himself on my presence, save when I chose to receive him—that he would not ask me to walk with him, unless I myself first signified my willingness—and to be brief, he used so many impassioned arguments and vehement entreaties, that I knew not how to refuse. The thought struck me, too, that if I did refuse, the madness of his passion was such that he might be rendered desperate, and my position would be made far worse; and the idea simultaneously occurred to me that my best course would be to throw him off his guard so that I might escape. I therefore consented to remain another month at the tower. But I informed him that it was absolutely necessary I should communicate with my brother in England, who would be uneasy at my long silence. He said that if I would write to him, addressing my letter from the French town of Perpignan, in the Pyrenees, one of his men should proceed thither and post the letter; and that if my brother wrote back to me to the post-office in that same town, he would send again at the expiration of ten days to fetch the letter for me. I gratefully accepted this proposal, and wrote to Frank at Southampton, desiring him to write back to me at Perpignan. I said nothing of my disagreeable adventure at Barcelona—nor of the strange company with whom I had been living for six weeks past: but I led him to believe that I was in a situation as governess in an English family. At the same time I wrote a letter to Mrs. Knight at Barcelona, explaining wherefore I had fled so precipitately, and telling her how the whole affair was a base conspiracy on the part of her wicked son to ruin me, in revenge because I had rejected his dishonourable overtures. This letter I sealed and enclosed it in the one to Frank, desiring him to post it at Southampton, and alleging some excuse for wishing such a thing done. When my packet was in readiness, I gave it to the Count: and he at once despatched a messenger with it to Perpignan. At the expiration of ten days I duly received Frank's answer from the school at Southampton, and therefore acquired the assurance that my own packet had been duly posted.

"I may here add that as my own garments were now wearing out, the messenger who had been sent to Perpignan, brought back with him a quantity of stuffs of various materials suited for dresses; and these were presented to me by Isabella. On the one hand I could not help being touched by this delicate consideration on the part of Christoval: but on the other hand, the circumstance made me apprehend that he by no means intended to part from me at the expiration of the month. I therefore watched anxiously for an opportunity of escape: but this I feared I should not very readily find—for the entrance of the tower was guarded day and night by two sentinels, the men taking their turns: while from my own chamber-window there was no possibility of flight, as it was too narrow for me to pass myself through it. To be brief, the month passed; and at the expiration of that time, Don Diego sought a private interview with me. His manner was as tender and as respectful as ever: but there was more firmness in his words and in his looks. He gave me to understand that he could not make up his mind to part with me—that I was dearer to him than life itself—that I need fear nothing at his hands, as he was perfectly contented to live on the same terms as at present—but that tyrannical, harsh, and unjustifiable though his conduct might be in retaining me a prisoner, he could not help doing so. I now remonstrated with him seriously, and for a moment angrily: but I saw that he was resolved—and from something which he let drop, it became evident enough that he hoped by persevering in his delicate attentions and tender assiduities, to make a favourable impression in the course of time upon me. I made him comprehend that this hope would be cruelly disappointed—and that if he persisted in retaining me captive at the tower, his conduct would efface all the generous and hospitable treatment I had experienced at his hands. He was deeply moved by what I said: and yet he relented not in his resolve to keep me a prisoner there.

"I must now pass over a period of about eight months and bring my narrative down to the month of June, 1840. During these eight months I remained at the tower. Every month was I permitted to write to Frank, the letter being posted at Perpignan; and as regularly was his answer brought thence for me. I continued to receive the utmost attention, kindness, and delicate treatment from Christoval, his men, and the women: my liberty was alone refused me. It is scarcely possible to comprehend the strange romantic passion of that man. He never forgot himself in my presence—never uttered a word to give me offence—never bent upon me a look which threatened me with insult. He never so much as took my hand, much less offered to carry it to his lips. He studied to the utmost of his power, apart from keeping me prisoner, to testify the devotedness of his passion. Often and often did I remonstrate, entreat, threaten, display indignation, and have recourse to prayers, all in their turn: but in vain! I have seen that man weep the bitterest tears when I have thus addressed him: I have seen him sob like a child as I have thrown myself at his feet and besought him to let me depart: but yet he had the courage and firmness to conquer his emotions sufficiently to make him refuse my prayer. And he too has thrown himself at my feet, but without so much as laying a finger upon my garments: he has besought and implored that I would lend a favourable ear to his tale of love, and consent to let a priest join our hands in marriage. When I renewed my representation that I was already married, he showed by his look that he could scarcely believe me: and yet he never said so in words. His appearance changed—he grew careworn—and though he relaxed not from those pursuits which belonged to his lawless

life, yet in other respects he lost all energy, and roved about the personification of despondency and despair. I could not help pitying him: but I could not love him. Never, perhaps, in this world did man testify so wild, so romantic, so devoted, and enthusiastic a love, without inspiring a reciprocal feeling. But he did not. I repeat that I pitied him, even when most angry at this outrageous prisonage which I endured; but, no—I could not love him.

"And during that interval of eight months, I had not the slightest opportunity of making even an attempt at escape. It is true that when out walking with Isabella, and followed at a short distance by one of the band, I might have suddenly darted off: but could I hope that my limbs would prove swifter than those of the alert and athletic Catalan bandit? and I was resolved not to suffer the mortification of making any ineffectual endeavour to emancipate myself. I must frankly confess that at last I got so accustomed to this strange mode of life, that it became far less irksome to me than might have been supposed. Indeed, I had few inducements to make me wish to return to the great world again—that world in which I had already experienced some misfortunes. But still I longed—Oh! most fervently longed to embrace my beloved brother; and I was also fearful that should the Christino soldiers ever take the tower by surprise, there might be a general fusilade of all its inmates, men and women without discrimination—and my unfortunate self amongst them. For I knew full well that the most atrocious barbarities were committed by the Spanish soldiers, no mercy even being shown to females or innocent children. That Don Diego Christoval himself full well suspected my hope and idea of escaping, there cannot be the slightest doubt: and hence the precautions which he took to anticipate any endeavour of that kind on my part. Nevertheless, I was not made positively to feel that I was a prisoner: it was a sort of honourable captivity in which I was kept. For instance, the door of my chamber was never bolted outside at night: but then, although I was thus at liberty to quit my room if I chose, I could not have issued forth from the tower, as there were two sentinels ever posted at the entrance-door.

"One day, after the return of the Count and his band from a marauding expedition, they brought the intelligence, which they had gleaned at some distant village, that the Captain-General of Catalonia had marched forth from Barcelona at the head of a considerable body of troops, with the intention of scouring the Catalan hills and annihilating the guerilla and bandit hordes which infested those districts. It was likewise understood that the military commandant intended to divide his troops into five or six flying columns, with a view to carry on his operations in various parts of the principality at the same time. It was therefore a serious danger which now appeared to be imminent. I sought an opportunity of speaking alone with Christoval, and represented to him that if he really entertained towards me the devoted passion which he had professed, it was cruel to a degree to expose me to the chance of falling into the hands of the Captain-General's troops. He bade me fear not: for that an incessant look-out would be kept, and on the first appearance of one of the flying columns in that immediate neighbourhood, it was his intention to remove with his band into the wild fastnesses of the Pyrenees, where they could remain until the present danger should be over. At the same time Don Diego assured me that if the peril became more serious than he could at that moment anticipate, he would at once send me under safe and honourable escort into France. He availed himself of that opportunity to fall upon his knees again in my presence, vowing that if I would consent to become his companion for the rest of our lives, he would at once take leave of his associates and fly away with me into another country. But still did I persevere in my refusal: for I was prepared to encounter all risks and meet all dangers, rather than surrender myself up to one whom I did not love.

"For several days Don Diego himself, disguised in various garbs, penetrated to a distance to learn tidings relative to the movement of the Captain-General's troops; and one evening, on his return to the tower, he brought intelligence of such importance that a council of the whole band was immediately called. In these deliberations the women were accustomed to be present; and on this occasion I was amongst them. I had already picked up the Spanish language with the utmost facility, though I could not converse in it with the same fluency and accuracy as I could in the French tongue. I nevertheless understood all that was said in my presence. It appeared from what Don Diego reported, that one of the flying colums was at a distance of about ten miles from the tower, and that it was commanded by a brigadier-general, to whom the son of the Captain-General was attached as aide-de-camp. It further appeared that the officers had fixed their quarters at a little farm-house, the occupants of which experienced a devoted friendship for Don Diego Christoval. At the council which sat to deliberate upon these particulars, a bold and daring project was started by Christoval himself. This was nothing less than to make a midnight attack upon the farm-house, carry off the son of the Captain-General, and hold him as a hostage for the safety of the band. Nay, more—it was even calculated that an immense ransom might be obtained for his restoration. This proposal was received with enthusiastic acclaim by the members of the band; and the women themselves welcomed it with delight. It would have been a project of sheer madness, were it not for the friendly disposition of the occupants of the farm: but under those circumstances it was one which presented every chance of being successfully carried out. Accordingly, a little before midnight, Christoval and ten of his followers, —two remaining behind as sentinels,—set out upon their expedition. During their absence I remained with the Catalan women in the common room of the tower: for I naturally felt anxious as to the result, and could not possibly retire to rest. I feared that in case of failure, a pursuit might be instituted by the troops; and their arrival at the tower might promptly follow. Besides, although not entertaining the slightest affection for Don Diego—and indeed having much reason to be displeased with him —there was nevertheless a certain friendly feeling which I experienced towards him, at all events sufficient to render me anxious for his safety. The

Catalan women chatted cheerfully and merrily: they appeared to be confident that the enterprise would be crowned with success. And they were right. For between two and three o'clock in the morning, Christoval and his men returned with the Captain-General's son as their prisoner. He was a young man of about five-and-twenty, of middle height—slender, and well made. His countenance was not handsome, but might be termed prepossessing, and was invested with an air of mingled heroism and intelligence. He bore himself with a dignified hauteur, and was by no means cast down by the position in which he was placed. I should add, for the better understanding of what is to follow, that he was dressed in a blue frock coat, fitting tight to his person and buttoned up to the throat—plain dark trousers—and the usual Spanish shako. It appeared from what I subsequently learnt, that the capture of this young officer had been effected all in a moment, with the utmost ease, and without a shot being fired or a blow struck. From information secretly given to Don Diego by the farmer himself, the aide-de-camp, being on duty all that night, was frequently passing between the farm-house and the outposts of the column, which were at a little distance, at a suitable place for the bivouac;—and totally unsuspicious that such a daring attempt would be made, the officer passed to and fro between the two points, alone and unattended, and smoking his cigar. Christoval and his band lay in ambush at a convenient spot sufficiently removed from the scene of danger; and watching their opportunity, they pounced upon the aide-de-camp, overpowered and gagged him in a moment, and hurried him away. When sufficiently distant from the troops, the gag was removed from his lips, and he was assured of honourable treatment if he attempted no resistance —which indeed he was not in a condition to offer. Under such circumstances was it that the enterprise had succeeded; and he was brought a captive to the tower.

"On the following day he was compelled by Christoval to write a letter to the brigadier commanding the column, stating that he was captive in the hands of a guerilla-party of Carlists—that the conditions of his release were immunity for themselves and the payment of a certain ransom-money—that he requested the column might not advance farther in a northerly direction pending the negotiations for his release—as if it did, his life would be sacrificed—that he was unable to specify the place where he was retained captive—and he concluded by desiring that the bearer of his letter should be treated with a consideration due to the sanctity of a herald under such circumstances.

"With this document Don Diego Christoval himself set off to the farm-house, the quarters of the brigadier commanding the column. During his absence, the young officer remained a close prisoner at the tower. He sat smoking in what I have before described as the common-room; and unbending towards the women, he chatted frankly and gaily with them. I was there for a portion of the time; and the officer, finding me to be an English woman, was naturally surprised at my presence with that lawless band. Isabella, for the kind purpose of screening me in case of any subsequent disaster, told him that I was a prisoner as well as himself; and this was the first time that the fact had ever been positively proclaimed in words. But it was now mentioned to serve, and not to annoy; and instead of being angry or hurt, I felt grateful and pleased. The officer paid me much attention, mingled with the most courteous respect. I found him to be a generous-hearted, intelligent young man; and as he spoke French perfectly, I was enabled to converse with him. At the expiration of a few hours, Christoval returned. He announced that the brigadier had undertaken not to push his column any farther in a northerly direction; but that he himself was unable to conclude the negotiation for the prisoner's release, until he should have communicated with the Captain-General, the young man's father; and as it was not precisely known in what part of the country he might be at the time, and couriers would have to seek him, it had been arranged that Don Diego Christoval should return to the farm-house, the brigadier's head-quarters, at the expiration of a week. Meanwhile it was understood that the Captain-General's son should be treated with all possible respect and attention. Accordingly, having communicated these results of his interview with the brigadier, Don Diego intimated to the officer that if he would pledge his word of honour not to escape, he might consider himself free to walk about, alone and at all hours, within one mile of the tower. This *parole* was promptly given; and the young officer now remained only in what might be termed an honourable captivity. Thus several days passed, during which the prisoner paid increased attention to me—or rather endeavoured to do so: but I suffered him to perceive that his assiduities were not acceptable. Indeed, I was most careful not to provoke Christoval's jealousy, apprehensive lest in a fit of desperation he might be led to adopt summary and violent measures to make me his own. Besides, the Spanish officer inspired me with no more tender interest than the Count himself had done; and as I always despised a mere frivolous coquetry, I had not the least inclination to divert myself in that respect at the prisoner's expense.

"I must now proceed to observe that after the first day's prisonage, he grew restless, and roved about in the vicinage of the tower, almost constantly smoking. I was told, too, that instead of going to bed when the others retired, he issued forth with his cigar in his mouth, and rambled in the wood till a late hour. He was suffered to do exactly as he chose, the utmost faith being reposed in his *parole*—a pledge which a Spanish officer was very seldom known to break, and the breach of which would dishonour him for ever, even in the opinion of his own most intimate friends. Six days had passed; and on the ensuing one, Christoval was to return to the brigadier. On the sixth night I did not hear the young officer go forth as usual between ten and eleven o'clock, to smoke his cigar in the wood. I lay awake, listening: for an idea had sprung up in my mind —and the longer I thought of it, the more consistent and feasible did it become. An hour passed—and all remained silent. I rose from my bed—hurried on a few articles of clothing—stole noiselessly out of my chamber—and listened at the door of the one occupied by the officer. I could hear the regular respiration of one who sleeps. Cautiously did I open his door—and again I listened. Yes—he

slept. A candle was burning in the room. I stole in—he was in bed, and slumbering profoundly. I hastened to possess myself of his clothes; and perceiving a quantity of cigars scattered about on the table, took one of them. I was in mortal terror lest he should awake: but he did not—and I regained my own room safely and unobserved. Now for a bold enterprise! I hastened to apparel myself in the male costume I had thus self-appropriated;—frock-coat, trousers, boots, and shako—I had taken them all; and I clothed myself therewith. Then, lighting the cigar and putting it in my mouth, I descended the stairs. The door of the common-room was open—and the powerful moonlight streaming through the narrow window, fell upon a bright object that lay on the table. It was a pistol—and I lost no time in securing it about my person. Again I listened: all was quiet. Oh! how my heart palpitated as I opened the door of the tower. It was a fine night in the month of June: but the shade of the embowering cork-trees intercepted the effulgence of moon and stars. The two sentinels were smoking their pipes and conversing together within half-a-dozen yards of the gate. I passed out, imitating as well as I could the gait and bearing of the Spanish officer, and smoking my cigar in the most approved style. It was a moment of acute suspense: but when I found that the sentinels moved not, and that I was proceeding onward without the slightest molestation, the enthusiasm of an indescribable joy flamed up within me. It was the intoxication of triumph. But still I did not lose my presence of mind for a single moment; I did not hurry my pace until perfectly assured that I was beyond eye-shot of the sentinels. When once, however, deep in the shade of the grove, I tossed away the cigar, which had well nigh made me sick and left the most nauseating sensation behind. Then I did speed onward with all possible swiftness. Knowing, from all that had been said in my presence, in which direction the brigadier's column lay, I took precisely the opposite one: for I was fearful if I fell into the hands of the troops, I might be sent to Barcelona on account of the jewel-business. After making a slight circuit, so as to get clear of the eminence on the slope of which the tower stood, I took a northerly direction for the purpose of pushing my way towards the French frontier. As I caught the last glimpse of the old building whose summit appeared just above the trees, I thought to myself how boundless would be the rage and despair of Count Christoval when my flight should be discovered. But I was rejoiced at having effected my escape; and with as much speed as on the memorable night when I fled from Barcelona, did I pursue my way.

"I had with me a little money—just the same sum in fact which I possessed when flying from the above mentioned city; and I was resolved to obtain a change of apparel as soon as possible. I need hardly observe that I had not dared bring with me my own female raiment: for there were no means of concealing it under the tight-fitting uniform, and it would have been ruinous to my enterprise to come forth from the tower with a bundle. The enjoyment of liberty seemed to nerve me against fatigue, and gave a vigorous elasticity to my footsteps. I proceeded onward for hours, only resting at long intervals, and then but for a few minutes at a time. The morning dawned—the sun rose—and still I proceeded onward, through a wild and mountainous country without a single habitation. The Pyrenees were already in view—and I began to look about in every direction for a cottage, farm-house—or some dwelling, in short, where I might obtain refreshment and a change of raiment. All of a sudden I came upon the high road, and there the following spectacle met my view.

"In the middle of that highway, a post-chaise lay overturned: and a gentleman was leaning in a disconsolate manner, and with his arms folded, against it. One horse, whose traces had evidently been cut away, was browsing on the grass by the road-side: the other horse and the postilion were not to be seen. That gentleman was the only person visible upon the spot. From the point where this spectacle broke upon my sight, I was not immediately perceived by that gentleman: for I had stopped short amidst a knot of trees to contemplate the scene. At first I could not discern his countenance: but in a few moments—as he raised his eyes and looked with evident anxiety along the road—to my astonishment I at once recognised my treacherous enemy James Knight. Ah! and he was alone there—and I could upbraid him for his villanous conduct towards me. But of what use were upbraidings? Could I not turn the circumstance to my own advantage and punish him by a humiliating process at the same time? No sooner was the design conceived, than I resolved to execute it. Drawing forth my pistol, without knowing whether it was loaded or not, I suddenly appeared before the amazed and startled young man. He at once recognized me; and being a coward as well as a treacherous villain, fancied that I was about to immolate him to my vengeance. He fell upon his knees, beseeching me to spare him. While he remained in that humiliating posture, I bade him explain to me as briefly as possible the meaning of the circumstances in which I found him placed.

"He told me that the nature of his mother's affairs at Barcelona had rendered it needful to obtain certain documents from England; and that he had accordingly been despatched off post-haste upon the mission. About a quarter of an hour before I had arrived upon that spot, a party of robbers had sprung forth from amidst the adjacent trees. The horses had taken fright, rushed up the bank, and upset the chaise. The robbers had carried off his portmanteau, his purse, and whatsoever valuables he had about his person—and had decamped with their booty. The chaise was broken; and the postilion had ridden back on one of the horses to the nearest posting-house, which was about four miles distant, in order to obtain another chaise, or else succour to repair the over-turned one. Such was James Knight's recital, the truth of which appeared to be fully corroborated by circumstances. I bade him rise from his knees and give me his coat and hat in exchange for my military frock and shako. This he did, all the while beseeching and imploring in the most piteous terms that I would spare his life. I taunted him with his villany towards me, telling him that I would not degrade myself by wreaking my vengeance on so miserable a wretch. Having assumed his hat and coat—the latter a frock buttoning up to the neck and fitting me per-

fectly—I told him he might inform the postilion that the remaining horse would be found some short distance farther along the road; and leaping upon its back, I made the animal gallop away at the utmost speed of which it was capable. Having proceeded thus for about three miles, I came in sight of a little hamlet; and dismounting, tied the horse to a tree. I then continued my way on foot; and on reaching the hamlet, obtained refreshment. The cottagers, at whose dwelling I stopped, were naturally surprised to behold a female in male attire: but as I gave them a piece of silver as a remuneration for the sorry fare which was served up to me, they asked no questions. I did not tarry many minutes in that hamlet, but pursuing my way on foot, speedily entered upon the vast amphitheatrical chain of the Pyrenees.

"The ascent of the Pyrenees from the Spanish side, is steep, difficult, and dangerous. Sometimes, when having mounted a terrace or ledge of rock, perhaps a mile in length, the traveller finds his way suddenly barred by the towering wall of a still higher eminence, up which he may perhaps climb if he be of desperate boldness and of experience in the mode of scaling these rocky ramparts: but I dared not make such attempts. I therefore frequently had to turn back and take another course,—sometimes when advancing too quickly, nearly falling over the edge of a gulf on which I suddenly stopped short,—at other times terrified by a rush amongst the stunted trees or brushwood, with the idea that it was a wolf preparing to spring at me. Nevertheless, I pressed onward with a courage and an ardour that surprised myself, and with an exhilaration of spirits that was sustained by the excitement of my travel. During all that day, I did not succeed in advancing more than eight miles into the heart of the Pyrenees, in consequence of the many times I had to turn and retrace my steps, and of the circuitous paths that I had to pursue. As evening drew near, I felt excessively weary; and was rejoiced when I came in sight of a pleasing valley, on the slope of which stood a little cottage with a number of sheep grazing near. There I was welcomed by the shepherd and his wife—an elderly couple of hospitable disposition, and who asked no impertinent questions. I slept well that night; and on the following morning, resumed my travels. During this second day I passed through several picturesque valleys, reminding me of what I had read of Alpine scenery: for high above them towered the enormous peaks of the mountains, some covered with snow. There were glaciers upon those heights; and I learnt that avalanches were by no means unknown. I fell in with many shepherds tending countless flocks; and when I sought refreshment, it was readily afforded—a trifling remuneration, which was all that I could give, being gratefully accepted. At the end of my second day's journey, I had altogether accomplished thirty miles, including the distance performed on the first day, and was now within fifteen miles of the nearest village in the French territory. It was about sunset on the third day that I reached this village; and there my passport was demanded by a *gendarme* as I was about to enter a little inn. I showed it—for I had it with me; and then in reply to the officer's questions, I related sufficient of my past adventures to account for appearing in male attire, omitting however the circumstance of having made any exchange of garments with Mr. Knight. In short, I gave the *gendarme* to understand that these were the clothes in which I had escaped from the brigand's tower. The mayor of the village—a substantial farmer whose dwelling was upon the outskirts—heard my tale from the lips of the *gendarme;* and when I rose on the following morning, the landlady of the inn told me that the mayor desired to see me. I accordingly proceeded to his house, where he, his wife, and a grown-up family of sons and daughters, received me in the kindest manner. They invited me to remain a few days with them, and repose myself after the fatigues I had endured. This invitation I thankfully accepted; and I stayed with this amiable family for a week. I need hardly say that suitable female apparel was provided for me: but I may add that it was with some degree of regret I put off my male clothing—for I had grown accustomed to it, and preferred it to that which more properly became my sex. At the expiration of a week the farmer's wife, finding that I was anxious to depart, took me up to her own chamber to have a little conversation with me. She said that herself, her husband, and everybody indeed at the farm-house, had conceived such a liking for me that they could not bear the idea of my leaving except under circumstances of comfort. She said she had therefore prepared a box of apparel and various necessaries for my use; and likewise begged me to accept the loan of a sufficient sum of money to take me to the place of my destination, wheresoever it might be. While gratefully expressing my thanks for all this kindness, I declared my wish to return without delay to England; and the farmer's wife insisted upon my acceptance of five hundred francs—or twenty pounds—for my travelling expenses. With the assurance that I should never forget so much generosity, I took my leave of the kind lady, her sons and her daughters. The old man drove me over in his chaise-cart to the nearest town, whence I could obtain a conveyance for Paris. I was resolved to go to England by way of Calais, as I did not think fit to pass through Havre, for fear that Mrs. Knight or her son James should have made the friends whom they had in that town acquainted with the circumstances at Barcelona—or rather with a version of them most prejudicial to myself. I arrived without any accident, or adventure worth relating, at Calais; and thence I passed to Dover. Though anxious to proceed without delay to Southampton, in order to embrace my brother, yet having travelled almost day and night for the best part of a week in my journey from the extreme south of France to Dover, I was compelled to remain here a day or two to repose myself. I proceeded to the *Admiral's Head*, which was kept by Mr. Marshall, with whose eldest daughter I was at school at Southampton. Kate Marshall was delighted to see me; and when she introduced me to her parents and sisters as the schoolfellow of whom she had so often spoken, I was received with a most cordial welcome—not in the light of a guest to whom a bill was to be sent in, but as a friend and visitress. Kate Marshall was now eighteen years of age, and a very fine young woman. Her two sisters were likewise ex-

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cedingly handsome. They were moreover all three kind-hearted and generous-minded creatures, and strove to make me as happy and comfortable as possible. Kate, regarding me in the light of an old friend—a bosom-friend too, in whom she could place the utmost confidence—did not hesitate to admit me to the knowledge of a certain secret connected with her father's prosperity. She took me up into a little private chamber of her own, situated quite at the top of the house, and elegantly furnished. Here she showed me a singular contrivance for carrying on a correspondence with parties elsewhere, by means of a beautiful breed of carrier-pigeons which she possessed. I need not enter into minute particulars now. Suffice it to say that there was a little trap-door in the ceiling of this chamber, by which the feathered emissaries were enabled to enter that room of their own accord on their arrival from a journey. All the neighbours knew that Kate Marshall possessed this beautiful breed of pigeons: but none were aware of the purposes which they served. Kate however—as I above hinted—was inclined to be communicative with me; and she gave me some particulars respecting the uses of those pigeons.

"It appeared that Mr. Marshall had in an earlier part of his life been a sailor on board a privateer-vessel which his father had commanded; and in a conflict with a French cruiser, he and two or three others of the sailors were taken prisoners. His father (Kate's grandfather) managed however to escape with the privateer. Robert Marshall and his companions were taken to Calais, where they were held prisoners. While in Calais gaol, Robert Marshall fell in with a Frenchman who was a captive there for some offence against the laws of his own country, and who possessed an extraordinary breed of carrier-pigeons. The Frenchman was needy, and Robert Marshall had a sum of money secured about his person, which had escaped the notice of his captors. With a portion of these funds he bought some of the pigeons: thence an intimacy sprang up between him and the Frenchman—and in the course of conversation, they came to an understanding how a most valuable correspondence could be carried on (when the peace should be established) between Dover and Calais for the furtherance of the contraband trade. The matter, once broached, was promptly arranged between them. Soon afterwards the Frenchman obtained his liberty; and he assisted Robert Marshall to escape from Calais gaol. To be brief, Robert Marshall managed to get back to Dover with his valuable carrier-pigeons. At that time old Marshall (Robert's father) occupied a house in the neighbourhood of Dover; and there the head-quarters of the carrier-pigeons were established. When the Peace of 1815 took place, old Marshall bought the *Admiral's Head* with the monies he had made by privateering; and thither were the head-quarters of the birds transferred. Between Dover and Calais—that is to say between the Marshalls and the Frenchman—a frequent correspondence was kept up; and by means of this prompt interchange of intelligence, tidings were mutually conveyed enabling them to baffle the revenue-officers on either side of the channel in their contraband ventures. Old Marshall died—Robert Marshall succeeded to the *Admiral's Head*—and for years did he and his wife manage the breed of birds, the correspondence with the Frenchman, and the smuggling trade. Thus did they grow rich. The Frenchman died; and his son succeeded to the father's possessions and avocations. But of late years there was little correspondence kept up between the parties at Dover and those at Calais, both being too well off to run any risks, save when an opportunity presented itself for some very large gains. The Frenchman however, being an intelligent and enterprising man, saw how this rapid method of communication might be made the means of conveying news which should enable persons in London and Paris to take advantage of particular prices of the Funds or incidents of the Stock Exchange, and by judicious speculation make considerable gains. Robert Marshall, Kate's father, knew nothing of stock-jobbing and dabbling on the Exchange; and he therefore could not remove to London for that purpose. The Frenchman however found an agent in the British capital; and to his house, situated on the bank of the Thames, near London Bridge, several of the birds were accordingly removed, Marshall undertaking for a certain annual sum, regularly paid, to let the *Admiral's Head* continue as a resting-place or station for the feathered messengers. Other stations were established at Boughton and Gravesend, between London and Dover; while on the other side of the channel, the Frenchman made arrangements for the requisite number of stations between Calais and Paris. Thus for some years was the correspondence carried on between the financier in London and the Frenchman in Paris; and no doubt large sums of money were made from the intelligence which they were enabled so promptly to exchange, and which was thereby communicated in as many hours as it would otherwise have taken days to forward by the ordinary channels. When Kate Marshall left the school at Southampton two years previously to the time at which I thus saw her at Dover, she took charge of the little chamber at the top of the house, and which was fitted up with the arrangements to serve as a resting-place for the carrier-pigeons between London and Paris. Several of the birds were still kept at the *Admiral's Head;* and Kate took great pleasure in cultivating the breed.

"Such was the narrative that my friend Miss Marshall told me in the frank confidence of the sincere friendship which she experienced for me. Confidence begets confidence; and in return I gave her some particulars of the extraordinary adventures which had occurred to myself since we parted two years back at Southampton. I did not however mention any names—I mean in respect to my extraordinary marriage; and thus I suppressed those of the Marstons, Mrs. Lloyd, and the Marquis of Villebelle. I did however tell her frankly the incident of the jewel business at Barcelona, and how it led me to fly to the Catalan hills and fall into the hands of Don Diego Christoval. She laughed when I assured her that I did not really take the jewels; and I was some time before I could make her believe in my innocence. It was only when I grew angry at her scepticism that she ceased from her good-natured bantering upon the subject: but she added that if I had really taken those valuables, she should not have thought a bit the worse of me: adding that 'people must take care of themselves in this world.' I therefore saw

that my friend's principles upon this subject were far from being the most correct; and I have no doubt that having been accustomed to look back so constantly on her grandfather's privateering career and her father's smuggling transactions, her notions of propriety and rectitude had in certain cases been considerably damaged and warped. From the description I gave her of Count Christoval she admired him most rapturously, and vowed that she wished she had possessed such a chance of becoming the handsome Catalan bandit's bride. I must however do her the justice to declare that so far as female purity went, her conduct and that of her sisters was unimpeachable.

"I remained two whole days with the friendly Marshalls; and when I took my leave, it was with a promise that I would soon visit them again. Kate inquired into the condition of my funds, and offered me assistance from her purse: but I still possessed sufficient for my present requirements, and therefore refused her generous offer. From Dover I proceeded to Southampton, and made the best of my way to the school, with a heart yearning to fold my brother in a loving embrace. On arriving at the well-known establishment, I was at once admitted by Mr. Jennings himself, who had seen me pass by the window of the parlour where he was sitting. On beholding me, his countenance grew exceedingly mournful; and I apprehended that something had happened to poor Frank. He took me into his parlour; and there he bade me prepare myself for some afflicting intelligence. Heavens! what a shock did I now receive,—I who had come thither in the fervid hope of clasping my brother in my arms. Alas, I was informed that Frank was no more! For a few minutes I was overwhelmed with grief. Mr. Jennings sent for his wife; and with every appearance of the most genuine sincerity, did they administer consolation. I shed torrents of tears: for it seemed to me that the only being whom I had to love upon the face of the earth, was snatched from me. When the violence of my grief had somewhat subsided, I sought for particulars,—observing that the event must have been sudden indeed, as it was only two months since I had received a letter from Frank. Mr. Jennings proceeded to inform me that a very few days after Frank had thus written to me, the gentleman (the nobleman he should have said) who originally put him at the school, came and took him away. Jennings went on to inform me that Frank had been declining for some months past—and that if he had not mentioned it in his letters, it must have been through unwillingness to cause me affliction. He added that about three weeks after my brother had left the school, the gentleman (still of course speaking of the nobleman) wrote to inform him that the poor youth was no more. I did not for a moment suspect the truth of this story—a story which was all the more abominable and wicked, inasmuch as at the very instant it was told me Frank was still an inmate of that very school, and therefore within a few yards of the spot where I sat, pale and weeping, a listener to the fictitious narrative of his death. I asked Mr. Jennings who the gentleman (or nobleman, as I felt convinced he must be) was; but he declared that he himself knew not,—adding with a mysterious look, that both myself and Frank had been placed at the school under circumstances of secrecy into which he himself had not dared attempt to penetrate. In short, he gave me to understand that the gentleman (or nob'eman) who had taken Frank to the school, and had 'etched him away again, had used a fictitious name—that this same fictitious name had been appended to the letter containing the account of Frank's death—and that he possessed no clue to the real name nor even to the abode of that gentleman (or nobleman). What could I do? what could I say? The mystery thus observed—or rather, which was represented to me as being observed—corresponded so well with all the past details of everything relating to my brother and myself, that it wore an air of sterling truth. Wretched and almost heart-broken, I took my departure from the establishment, and proceeded by coach to London. I was resolved to make some endeavour to penetrate the mysteries connected with the past.

"On my arrival in the metropolis, I took a cheap lodging, and put myself into mourning for that brother whom I believed to be no more. I then proceeded to take a view of this cottage, so endeared to me as the home of my infancy and girlhood. It was shut up, and falling into decay. How I longed to live in it and settle myself down within its walls: but I had not the means. I proceeded on foot with the endeavour to find my way to that village where Mrs. Burnaby had taken us in the hired vehicle, and where the handsome equipage had waited to convey us to the house situated in the beautiful park. But the roads had most probably changed their appearance during the eight years which had elapsed since then; and at all events my memory served me not in respect to any features of the scenery which might guide me in the right direction. There is a complete labyrinth of roads intersecting each other in all that neighbourhood; so that I grew bewildered, and was compelled to give up the search after having vainly prosecuted it for two or three days. My funds were by this time totally exhausted; and I scarcely knew what to do. I wrote to Kate Marshall—but with great reluctance—requesting a temporary loan from her; and the return of post brought me a bank-note for twenty pounds. Thus I was relieved of anxiety for the immediate means of subsistence; and resolving to lose no time, I endeavoured to procure another situation as a governess. I answered advertisements in the newspapers—called at the residences of the parties advertising—but being unable to give any reference as to past character, experienced a cold refusal everywhere. Then I inserted advertisements asking for such a situation, and frankly stating that for reasons which I would explain orally, I was unable to offer testimonials: but these appeals elicited not a single response. Meanwhile weeks were slipping on—my money was diminishing—and I was oppressed by serious apprehensions for the future. Besides, I had contracted two debts that lay heavy enough upon my mind: one to the mayor's wife in the Pyrenean village—the other to Kate Marshall; and though I was well aware that they would neither expect to be paid very promptly, and the latter not at all until I should be fully able, yet I did not like the idea of those debts. I thought of taking in work; but I never was a good hand with the needle. I however made application at different places for such work, with the resolution to do any-

thing to earn an honest livelihood: but I experienced no success. In process of time my money disappeared: then I lived by making away with my articles of clothing—till at length I was reduced to such a condition that I was penniless, with long arrears of rent owing to a hard-hearted landlady, and without a single thing left to raise money upon.

"It was in the middle of winter, that one bleak horrible night, between nine and ten o'clock, I was turned out of my lodging. I had not a friend to whom I could go: I had not even a single acquaintance in London of whom I could ask the slightest favour. I wandered about all that wretched night. Be assured that I fell in the way of temptations by yielding to which I might at once have possessed gold. But no!—sooner than abandon myself to that hideous alternative, I was fully resolved to put an end to my existence. All the next day I roved through the streets of London, half mad with the torturing sense of my wretched position. Night came again—and I was still houseless, foodless, penniless. I had not eaten a morsel for many, many long hours: but yet I was not faint—I was desperate. A strange excitement was raging within me; and often and often did I catch myself dwelling upon Kate Marshall's words, when in a laughing bantering mood she had told me that she half-believed I really had taken Mrs. Knight's jewels, and that she should not think any the worse of me if I really had. Ah! why did the reminiscence of those words thus keep coming back to my mind? Was it that an evil spirit had been created at the time they were uttered, to lie in wait for me—haunt my footsteps unseen—mark when the moment of weakness and despair arrived—and then whisper these words anew in my ear? Certain it is that what was at first a mere reminiscence, became an inspiration—and that what became an inspiration grew into a resolution. Yes—a resolution engendered by despair, and desperately taken! I felt that I hovered between two distinct chasms—one yawning on my right hand, one upon my left. I must either plunge into that abyss in which woman's honour is engulfed; or I must throw myself headlong into the other where honesty is swallowed up. There I stood, already a lost being, though no deed of crime was done as yet: but still a lost being, because a fatal and irresistible necessity was impelling me onward to precipitate myself headlong into one of those gulfs. Under this influence I hurried through the metropolis—and gained the outskirts on the northern side, because they were those in which my recent searches after the road to the unknown village had been directed, and therefore had made me familiar with that neighbourhood. It was in a lonely part, where there were but six or seven houses scattered about, that my first crime was committed. Two ladies, apparently mother and daughter, came forth from one of those houses,—pausing upon the threshold to bid good night to a lady, evidently the mistress of that house, where they had no doubt been passing the evening. I heard the mistress of the house ask if she should send a servant to accompany them home: they laughed as they declined,—saying that as their own abode was but a hundred yards distant, they did not fear any danger for so short a walk. Yet it was in that brief intermediate space between the two dwellings, that they were stopped and plundered. Stopped too by one of their own sex! It was in the deep shade of some overhanging trees, so that my countenance could not possibly be discerned, that I confronted them and bade them deliver up their money, telling them that there were two men lurking on the opposite side of the way. The ladies, dreadfully frightened, gave me their purses, beseeching me not to let them be harmed. I assured them they should not sustain any injury if they forbore from crying out. Then I fled precipitately—took a circuitous route through some fields—and re-entered London.

"It was the middle of the night and the shops were closed. I could not purchase any food—I could not obtain a lodging at that hour; for I shrank from the idea of entering a public-house. I wandered about till morning, so bewildered and confused—so excited and agitated with the deed I had done, that methought it was all a dream. I could scarcely believe in my own identity; I could not persuade myself that it was really I who had committed that crime. I dared not feel in my pocket to clutch the purses, and thus convince myself that it was not a delusion. I did not therefore examine them till long after dawn. Then, stepping aside into a secluded street, I looked to discover the amount of my ill-gotten funds. There were altogether seven guineas in the two purses. I took a lodging—I procured food—I redeemed some of my apparel from the pawnbroker's—and I remained in doors for several days afterwards, fearing to go out lest I should be taken into custody. Nevertheless, in my calmer moments, when reasoning with myself, I knew full well that I could not possibly have been seen by the two ladies in a manner clear enough to enable them to identify me. I lived frugally and sparingly,—not daring to think of the future, although by this very economy postponing to the utmost of my power the necessity for a recurrence to the same desperate means. But that time came again. In another part of the outskirts of London I committed a similar deed; and on this occasion likewise, the sufferers were two ladies hastening home from a party. The produce was double as much as on the former occasion; and upon this I lived for many weeks. One day, about noon, I was passing along a retired street on my way to a tradesman's shop to purchase something, when an elderly gentleman walking in front of me, while pulling out his handkerchief drew forth his pocket-book at the same time. The next moment it was in my hands. The rapid glance which I flung around showed me that the circumstance was unperceived by the few persons passing in that street. The pocket-book was concealed beneath my shawl; and I walked firmly on. The old gentleman speedily missed it—felt in all his pockets—looked back in dismay—and accosting me, asked civilly whether I had happened to notice that he had just dropped anything? I replied in the negative, and continued my way. Regaining my lodgings, I examined the contents of the pocket-book. Two hundred pounds in bank-notes, and all for small sums! This circumstance filled me with exultation—an exultation indeed in which was absorbed all lingering sense of the criminality of the ways which I was pursuing. Alas! that I should be compelled to say this!

"I hastened to change several of the notes at different tradesmen's shops in the neighbourhood,—

thus converting them into gold. The next day I saw an advertisement in the newspaper offering a reward for the restoration of the pocket-book and its contents: but there was no intimation that the numbers of the notes were known, and the magnitude of the reward convinced me that they were not. Feeling now secure in the possession of my treasure, I reflected what course I should pursue. I dearly longed to have a quiet little comfortable suburban residence of my own; and I had now the means of obtaining one. I again bethought myself of the cottage where the earliest years of my life were passed: so I set off to look at it once more. A bill pasted against the front door, intimated that it was to let, and where intelligence could be obtained as to terms. I proceeded to the office of the house-agent whose address I thus learnt; and having ready money to pay down as an advance of rent, I was accepted as a tenant. Then I proceeded to furnish it, but in an economical manner: for I had a great deal to do with this money. I remitted the twenty pounds, through a London banker, to the mayor of the Pyrenean village, accompanied by a letter of thanks for the kindness I had received at his hands and those of his family; and when my house was fitted up and I had engaged a servant—this present one, Rosa—I set off to pay the Marshalls a visit at Dover. By them I was kindly welcomed. I returned Kate the money she had lent me; and when we were alone together, she questioned me closely as to what I was doing—particularly how I came to be so well dressed and had such a command of funds? I evaded her queries at first; and she again fell into that humour of good-tempered bantering in which she is apt to indulge, at the same time hinting her suspicion that I had found some wealthy lover. Singular as it may seem—strangely idiosyncratic as it may appear—I preferred proclaiming myself what I really was, than resting under the suspicion of being what I was not: and I accordingly told Kate all I had suffered—my wretched wanderings without food or shelter through the streets of the metropolis—and the desperate measures into which I had been forced. She wept in sympathy for the miseries and privations I had gone through, and appeared to admire me rather than otherwise for the course I had chosen. To my annoyance, I found that she even told her parents and her sisters all that had happened; and they thought no more of it than she did—or at least they thought none the worse of me. I remained for about a fortnight at Dover; and when I was about to take my departure, Kate offered me some of her beautiful pigeons,—observing that it would prove an amusement to attend to them, and that by some means or another they might even become useful. I told her that I did not possibly see how this latter portion of her remark could be realized: when she said, 'My dear Elizabeth, if you continue in your present career, which I am sure you will—for you have taken a good leaf out of Don Diego's Christoval's book—you are certain sooner or later to get yourself into trouble, from which one of these winged messengers might possibly rescue you. For instance, if at any time you wished to prove that you were at Dover at a certain hour when others may swear you were in London, send off a billet containing the necessary particulars to me; and it can be managed.'—I accepted four of the pigeons, and brought them with me to this cottage, where I have them now.

"Some months passed, during which I lived comfortably and happily enough—but in a sort of reckless and desperate manner in respect to my thoughts for the future. The boundary between honesty and dishonesty was completely passed over: and I began to consider that it was my destiny to follow the career upon which I had entered. I found that my servant Rosa was a good-hearted woman, who had taken a very great liking to me: but she was evidently at a loss to understand the sources of my income, or who or what I was. I never had a soul to see me, either male or female; and my habits were such that she could not possibly suspect any impropriety on my part *as a woman*. It must indeed have appeared singular to her that I should live thus secluded, months passing without a single soul visiting the cottage. At length, as my funds grew low, I perceived the necessity of replenishing them: but I likewise saw how dangerous it was for a woman to prosecute the course on which I had entered. A female may be described so much more easily than one of the other sex; and moreover ladies might resist the predatory demands of a woman, when they would yield at once in terror to those of a man. Thus was it that a train of reflection one day led to the idea of assuming male apparel. But this could not be done without admitting Rosa into my confidence. Gently and gradually did I break to her the circumstances of my position,—so cautiously and warily indeed, that she was not shocked by any suddenness of disclosure. To be brief, I found that I had not done wrong to admit her as my confidante; and my design was soon carried out. Under pretence of requiring a masquerade garb, I procured a complete suit of male apparel from a tailor; and shortly after I fetched it away, I made my first experiment in that disguise. But upon this part of my history I will not dwell at unnecessary length. If I have launched into so many details in respect to my criminal career, it is only because when first entering on my history, I resolved to speak without reserve; and this very avowal of my iniquities constitutes no mean portion of the heavy punishment I deserve.

"Months passed away—and by those means to which I need not more particularly allude, I obtained sufficient to live upon. One day, when dressed in my female garb, I was passing through a street at the West End, having some purchases to make; and I encountered Sir John Marston. He was startled and surprised at beholding me—looked confused—and seemed as if he would have given a great deal to avoid such an encounter. More than ever convinced by his manner that he had wronged me in some way which I could not well understand, I said to him that the time would come when he must answer to me for the past. Recovering his wonted effrontery, he declared that he had nothing to answer for: whereupon I assured him that I was far from satisfied with his conduct towards me, and would do my best to penetrate the meaning of it. He asked me how I was circumstanced?—but instead of giving a direct reply, I inquired how it was possible I could be otherwise than poor, inasmuch as I had no doubt been defrauded out of money that was due to me. At this he affected to be very indignant,—reminding me of the five thou-

sand pounds I had received, and which he said ought to have served as the fund of an income for my whole life. I then explained how I had been robbed of it within a few days after receiving the amount from him; and I insisted that he should do more for me, unless he wished me to give publicity to the whole affair of the mysterious marriage with the Marquis of Villebelle. Thereupon he replied that he was not at all influenced by my threats—but that out of compassion, he would allow me an income sufficient to keep me from want. But seeing me well dressed, he asked how I had been living? I at once boldly informed him that I held the situation of governess in a wealthy family—but that the duties thereof were most irksome, and that I had long thought of writing to him through his lawyer to demand an account of those monies which I felt convinced he must have deprived me of. After some reflection, he offered me two hundred a-year if I would forbear from giving publicity to the circumstances of the marriage in Paris. Seeing that he was thus yielding, I at once declared that I would effect no such compromise—but that if he would double the amount I would listen to his terms. He agreed; and we went together to the office of his attorney Mr. Robson, whom he instructed in my presence to pay me one hundred pounds a quarter. He introduced me as the Marchioness of Villebelle, in which name I was of course to sign the receipts. A hundred pounds were paid to me at once—and we separated.

"I purchased a horse, and amused myself with riding about the neighbourhood of my cottage-residence. And now it may be asked wherefore I did not renew my search after that village to which I had been taken by Mrs. Burnaby, and for that splendid mansion in the park where I had seen the invalid lady? The explanation is easily given. When I first made those researches, I was untainted by the consciousness of crime; and if I could have discovered a clue to that lady, I might have presented myself to her with an unblushing countenance, whether she were my mother or whatsoever degree of relationship she stood in towards me. But now it was very different!—and I shrank from the idea of making any discovery in that quarter. Therefore I studiously avoided riding in the direction which, so far as my memory served me, I had been taken that day by Mrs. Burnaby.

"Possessed of an income of four hundred a-year, it might be supposed that I had sufficient resources without the necessity of recurring to my evil ways of life. But without being able to account for it, I am forced to confess that I loved the excitement thereof. It had become to me the same as hunting or steeple-chasing to those who indulge in such sports. At this moment, when, thank heaven! my mind has assumed a better tone, I recoil in horror and with a shuddering aversion from the bare idea that I was ever influenced by such a morbid state of feeling. Such however was the case *then:* and from time to time I apparelled myself in my male garb, and mounting my horse, rode out at night upon the highway. Never did I perpetrate any violence: never did I harm a single hair of a human being's head. One night, in the neighbourhood of Hornsey, I stopped an old man who was driving along in a gig. He assured me he had nothing about him worth the taking. I made him hand me his purse which, as I found, contained but a few shillings. I gave it him back again, and was about to gallop away, when he said boldly that if I knew him better I could no doubt make his services available He then told me, after a little more conversation, that his name was Solomon Patch, and that he kept a public-house in Agar Town, St. Pancras—that he was acquainted with a great many persons who lived at the expense of others—and that he gave an excellent price for whatsoever valuables might be brought to him. I replied that I should not forget the intimation—and we parted. Some time afterwards I visited this man's house in Agar Town, and found there a motley assemblage of wretches, male and female, whose looks bespoke their characters and their avocations. I gave them money wherewith to purchase liquor; and as Solomon Patch failed not to hint how we first became acquainted, they learnt what I was. They insisted upon knowing my name; but I only told them my christian one. Some person present at once dubbed me *Lady Bess:* and that is the name by which I have been known amongst them ever since. A short time after my adventure with Solomon Patch, I paid another visit to the Marshalls at Dover; and no longer feeling any shame at the career I was pursuing—but glorying in it rather than otherwise—I gave Kate an account of my various adventures. She told me in her turn that she had become engaged to a young man by the name of Russell, who was captain of a vessel ostensibly trading to the French and Spanish ports, but in reality engaged in the contraband trade. She added that Russell was making considerable sums of money; and that when he had amassed a fortune they were to be married.

"My history is now drawing to a close: but there is one incident that deserves special mention. One day, about six months ago, I was riding on horseback, dressed in my female attire, through Edmonton—when a riderless steed galloped by me; and a little a-head I beheld a number of persons running to the assistance of a gentleman who had been thrown off. On reaching the spot, I instantaneously recognized in that individual my treacherous enemy James Knight! He was senseless: and, indeed, at the first glance I felt assured he was dead. Such proved to be the fact. He was borne into the house of a neighbouring surgeon, who pronounced life to be extinct, his skull having received a terrible fracture. I did not say at the time that I knew him: but when his person was searched to discover who he was, cards and letters were found upon him indicating both his name and address. On the following day I repaired to that address, being somewhat anxious to see Mrs. Knight and ascertain what her sentiments were in respect to the jewel business at Barcelona; for though I had recently been leading a life which might be supposed to render me but little scrupulous in such matters, yet I did not wish her to retain the impression that I had rewarded her kindness at the time by a black ingratitude. I had not forgotten how she had received me into her family when I was friendless and penniless at Havre after the robbery of the diligence; and I was anxious to re-establish myself in her good opinion, if I had really lost it. On arriving at the house, which was in a genteel street at the West End of the town, I found all the blinds drawn down, and the aspect of the dwelling denoted the sombre gloom of death.

On sending in my name, I was speedily admitted, and was ushered into the presence of Mrs. Knight. She was overwhelmed with grief at her son's death: but she received me most kindly; and believing my visit to be one of condolence and sympathy towards herself, thanked me with fervid gratitude. I therefore saw at once that she entertained no evil opinion of me. After some little conversation she began to touch upon the incident which had made me flee from Barcelona so precipitately. She said that at the time she naturally believed I was really guilty of the theft of the jewels: but that when she received the letter which I wrote at Don Christoval's tower, and which I sent to the post through Frank at Southampton, she at once viewed the matter in quite a different light. She had questioned her son anew, and the confused answers he gave confirmed my tale of his villany. Then he confessed everything, expressing deep contrition for what he had done; and his mother forgave him. She did not make the most distant allusion to the incident of her son's subsequent meeting with me on the borders of the Pyrenees, and having to surrender up a portion of his clothing—or rather to make an exchange; and therefore I presumed that he had felt too much ashamed of his pusillanimity on the occasion to mention the event to his mother. With respect to her own affairs, she informed me that she had at length, and after a great deal of trouble, settled them satisfactorily, and that her fortune proved to be greater than she had at first anticipated. I condoled with her on the loss she had sustained in respect to her son—describing how I had witnessed the occurrence: and I took my leave of her, well pleased to find that I had not suffered in her good opinion."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A CHANGE OF ABODE.

Lady Bess, having brought her narrative down to the point at which the preceding chapter concluded, went on to relate how she had one day encountered the Marquis of Villebelle, and how she had promised to deliver up to him the various papers proving their marriage. The reader will recollect that in the earlier portion of this tale, Lady Bess charged a certain Tony Wilkins, at Solomon Patch's house at Agar Town, to present a sealed packet to a gentleman whom he would meet at King's Cross. That gentleman was the Marquis of Villebelle; and that packet contained the documents she had volunteered to give up.

She then proceeded to describe how, in company with Chiffin the Cannibal, she had waylaid Messrs. Marlow and Malton—how she had fled to Dover—and how one of the carrier-pigeons which Kate Marshall had given her, proved the means of extricating her from that dilemma. Then she described how, some little time afterwards, she had met her brother Frank in the street, and how overjoyed as well as amazed she was to find that he was in the land of the living. She related everything Frank himself had told her in respect to his own history after he had quitted the school at Southampton—now he had obtained a situation at Court—how he had there recognized Lord Petersfield, and the two ladies whom he had twice seen in the companionship of her whom he believed to be his mother—how he had been abruptly but honourably removed from his situation in the Royal Household—and how, through Lord Petersfield, he had obtained another place: namely, that in Lady Saxondale's service.

Lady Bess likewise described without reserve how she had called upon Lord Petersfield, and extracted the portrait which had so much excited Frank's attention, and which was subsequently recognized by Adolphus as that of his mother Lady Everton. Then Elizabeth Chandos entered more fully into details than she had done on the previous day, in respect to the researches she had made with regard to those circumstances that so closely concerned Adolphus: she minutely narrated all she had learnt from old Bob Shakerly; and she made no secret of the stratagem she had devised and executed for eliciting from Marlow and Malton the abode of Lady Everton. In the course of these explanations, she did not forget to state how Theodore Barclay had been bribed to betray what he knew concerning past events; and how it was through his suggestion she had called upon the lawyers.

"And now, Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, thus winding up her narrative, and speaking in a low and tremulous voice, full of emotions,—"I have unbosomed all my secrets to you, as if I were on a death-bed making revelations of everything! You are acquainted with all the errors of which I have been guilty: my whole life is before you. In whatsoever colours I now find myself in your presence, I at least have the satisfaction of having told the truth: for I repeat, there is within me the intuitive feeling that you had some right to demand these explanations at my hands. But you have promised not to be too severe in your blame; and the emotions which you have exhibited at many parts of my history, give me every reason to hope that you are not judging me too harshly—too severely!"

"Heaven forbid, my dear Elizabeth!" said the old gentleman, down whose cheeks the tears were flowing fast: and this was not the first time he had been profoundly moved during the two hours which had elapsed since Lady Bess first commenced her history. "Blame you—no!" he added, with sudden vehemence, as he wiped away those tears; and starting from his chair, he began to pace the room in the utmost agitation. "I cannot blame you! The blame rests with those villains who robbed yourself and your poor brother out of the ample fortunes which should have been your's, and which, by making you rich, would have elevated you high above the possibility of any temptation. Ah, yes! and there has been blame attaching to another—another, who should have looked after your welfare—who should not have left you both so completely at the mercy of those men——But no matter: the past cannot be recalled! In respect to you yourself, Elizabeth, there is at least one cause for rejoicing,—that as a woman you have not fallen—you have not disgraced yourself! And now show me once more that letter which you received from the Marquis of Villebelle when he was at Dover. You showed it to me yesterday—I wish to look at it again."

"Certainly," responded Lady Bess: and she hastened to produce from her writing-desk the epistle which Mr. Gunthorpe asked for. Its contents were as follow:—

"*Admiral's Head*, Dover,
"July 12, 1844

"I have not hitherto had an opportunity of expressing my sincerest and most heartfelt thanks for the generous conduct you have observed towards me in respect to that strange transaction which took place in Paris five years back, and to which I need not more particularly allude. It is evident that Miss Marshall, the eldest daughter of the landlord of this inn, is to a certain extent your confidante; and she has this day rendered me a most signal service, the nature of which she will no doubt explain to you. I naturally conjecture that were it not for certain revelations which you must have at some time or another made to her, she would not have had it in her power to render me that service.

"I must now explain my principal object in penning these few lines; and being unacquainted with your address, I shall entrust the letter to Miss Marshall, that she may forward it. I just now had occasion to call at the residence of Sir John Marston, who is dwelling in this town. During his momentary absence from the room where he received me, I happened to glance at a paper which lay open upon his desk. It was a letter addressed to him, and bearing the signature of a certain *Louisa Lloyd*—doubtless that same Mrs. Lloyd who was present at the transaction in Paris to which I have above alluded. In that letter my eye caught the names of *Elizabeth and Francis Paton*; and then immediately followed these words:—'*I hope and trust there is no possible chance of their discovering that their father is the Marquis of Eagledean.*' This is all I saw: for Sir John Marston returned to the room immediately afterwards. I do not know whether you have already made the discovery which Mrs. Lloyd appears so earnestly to hope that you have not: but I consider the matter to be one of sufficient importance to be at once communicated to you. If, by making such communication, I am rendering you the slightest service, I shall feel truly rejoiced; and though I must always remain your debtor for your generous conduct in giving up those documents some weeks back, yet may I hope that the contents of this letter will acquit me of some part of the immense obligation I owe you.

"Permit me to subscribe myself
"Your devoted friend and well-wisher,
"VILLEBELLE."

Mr. Gunthorpe perused this letter with as much attention as if he had not read it on the preceding day; and as he handed it back to Elizabeth, he appeared to be absorbed in the deepest reflection, still pacing the room to and fro. Suddenly stopping short, he was about to say something, when she exclaimed, as she glanced forth from the window, "Here are Frank and Adolphus returning from their walk!"

Mr. Gunthorpe looked at his watch, and said, "It is close upon two o'clock, at which hour I ordered my carriage to return. Elizabeth, it was my purpose to have made certain revelations to you, which it is necessary you should learn: but I cannot do it now. You must restrain your impatience yet a little while——"

"But tell me, Mr. Gunthorpe," she said, in a tone of anxious entreaty, "who are you, and wherefore do you take such an interest in the affairs of Frank and myself? Do tell me—I beseech you to tell me!——One word will suffice——Frank and Adolphus are entering the house——Quick, quick! do speak that word!"

"I am the bosom-friend of the Marquis of Eagledean," he replied in a hurried manner.

Elizabeth Chandos looked disappointed, but yet somewhat bewildered and incredulous.

"Hush!" said Mr. Gunthorpe; "no more now! But as the friend of your father—as one acquainted with all his secrets—and one having full power to act on his behalf, you must suffer me to take certain immediate steps in respect to yourselves."

"Do what you will, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Lady Bess: "for we are in your hands."

At this moment Adolphus and Frank entered the room, and were much delighted to find Mr. Gunthorpe there. Warm greetings were exchanged; and refreshments being placed upon the table, the old gentleman gladly accepted a glass of wine—for he had evidently passed through a sad and exciting ordeal while listening to Elizabeth's history. By the time luncheon was over, his carriage drew up in front of the cottage.

"Now," said Mr. Gunthorpe, "you are all three about to quit this place and remove to my residence. Do not look upon me thus with so much astonishment: I am perfectly serious. Yes—for many, many reasons must you all three come and take up your abode beneath my roof. Let your preparations be hastily made. Some of my servants shall come in the course of the day and fetch away your boxes. Adolphus—Frank—go to your rooms and get in readiness. Elizabeth, remain here with me."

The two young men hesitated not to obey Mr. Gunthorpe's directions; and when they had quitted the apartment, he turned towards the lady, saying, "You will permit me to dispose as I choose of your furniture and such matters beneath this roof. I can assure you, Elizabeth, you will never require them again. Now go and send back to Miss Marshall the carrier-pigeons which she gave you; and if you choose to forward by one of them a little billet, to the effect that altered circumstances on your part preclude the possibility of your ever more needing these feathered agents, it will perhaps be as well. You understand me, Elizabeth? Go, my dear girl. And tell Rosa—for that I think is your servant's name—to come hither, as I wish to speak to her."

Elizabeth obeyed these instructions as deferentially as Adolphus and Frank had hastened to fulfil those which they on their part had received; and Rosa came into the presence of Mr. Gunthorpe.

"My good young woman," said he, "your mistress, her brother, and their guest are about to leave this abode. I am well aware that you are acquainted with much—too much, concerning Mrs. Chandos. I am not however going to utter a word of blame or reproach on account of the past; but I wish to make it well worth your while to bury in oblivion all you do know concerning that lady. She will leave the cottage just as it is. There is a lease, I believe—and that you can have: all the furniture is likewise your's. Here are fifty pounds for your immediate wants; and every half-year you will receive a cheque from me for the sum of twenty-five pounds. Upon an annual income of fifty pounds you can live respectably. You may take lodgers to make up enough to pay your rent. But all this is done for you on condition that you set a seal upon your lips in respect to whatsoever you may know concerning Mrs. Chandos. Now go up-stairs—fetch down her male apparel—take it into the kitchen—and tear it to pieces. I shall come in a few minutes and see that you have done so. Go: but take your money—and don't stand staring at me in this vacant bewildered manner."

Thus did Mr. Gunthorpe issue his commands; and Rosa, finding that he was altogether serious—

CHIFFIN THE CANNIBAL.

as indeed the bank-notes he had placed upon the table fully proved—hastened to obey him. In a few minutes the old gentleman, who seemed determined to do things in quite a business-like manner, found his way into the kitchen, and expressed his satisfaction when he perceived that Rose had literally fulfilled his instructions and had torn up Lady Bess's frock coat, waistcoat, and trousers into shreds.

"There," he said; "that will do. By the by, there's a horse? She will have no further need of that—and you may cause it to be sold and take the proceeds for yourself. But mind that it is sold."

Having thus spoken, Mr. Gunthorpe retraced his way to the parlour, where he was speedily joined by Adolphus, Frank, and Elizabeth. The lady threw upon him a significant look, to imply that his instructions in respect to the pigeons had been duly carried into effect. They then all four entered the carriage, which drove away towards Stamford Hill.

"It is my wish," said Mr. Gunthorpe, while proceeding thither, "that you, Elizabeth, should resume your maiden name of Miss Paton. It is by this name you will be known beneath my roof."

Frank glanced towards his sister in a manner which showed that he saw full plainly she had been telling all the history of her past adventures to Mr. Gunthorpe; and while he was rejoiced that she should resume her maiden name, thereby severing herself as it were from several painful reminiscences, he could not help admiring the generosity of their kind-hearted friend, whose benevolence continued unchanged towards her. As for Adolphus, he was too much inexperienced in the ways of the world to think that there was anything very peculiar in the intimation which Mr. Gunthorpe had just given relative to the resumption of Elizabeth's maiden name; while the lady herself was prepared to follow in all things the instructions of one who appeared to have such full authority to issue them.

On arriving at the mansion, Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank were provided with handsome apartments: two valets were assigned as special attendants upon the young gentlemen respectively; so that Francis Paton, from having been a page himself, had one to wait upon him. A female dependant was attached to Elizabeth in the quality of lady's-maid: and thus was it evident by all these arrangements, that Mr. Gunthorpe purposed to treat his guests with the utmost kindness and distinction. He sent off a note desiring Mrs. Leyden, Henrietta, and little Charley, to come and dine at the Manor at five o'clock; and when the whole party assembled in the magnificent drawing-room, the old gentleman appeared resolved to banish from his mind whatsoever cares or disagreeable reflections were harboured therein, that he might both enjoy and enhance the happiness which he was thus diffusing around him.

And it was indeed a happy party gathered on this occasion! Need we say that Henrietta and Adolphus sat together at the dinner-table, and likewise in the drawing-room in the evening? or need we add that they experienced all the delight enjoyed by lovers who behold no barrier to the progress of their affection and its ultimate felicity? Mrs. Leyden, too, was amply recompensed, in her altered circumstances and prospects, for the many troubles and misfortunes which she had gone through: while little Charley was never tired of gazing around in childish wonder upon the splendid apartments, with their sumptuous furniture and their brilliant lights.

On the following morning Adolphus proceeded to call upon Henrietta, in pursuance of a suggestion which Mr. Gunthorpe threw out—or rather a permission which he gave: for the young nobleman was docile as a child, and almost as unsophisticated as one,—being yet too timid and bashful to take any important step of his own accord. Alas, so considerable a portion of his life had been spent in a close and cruel confinement! Mr. Gunthorpe had purposely sent him out of the way that he might have an opportunity of making certain important revelations to Elizabeth and Frank. Accordingly, as soon as Adolphus had taken his departure in the carriage which was placed at his disposal to convey him to Mrs. Leyden's cottage, the old gentleman conducted Elizabeth and Frank to the library of the mansion; and taking a chair, he bade them seat themselves opposite to him, and listen attentively to the narrative he was about to unfold. There was a fervid curiosity in the mind of the youth; and though this same feeling was also experienced by his sister, it was blended on her part with a kind of solemn awe; for she was eight years older than her brother, and therefore more thoughtful in respect to the incidents which were now occurring, and more shrewd in forming certain suspicions and conjectures on particular points. When they were both seated near Mr. Gunthorpe, he addressed them in the following manner:—

"I am about to speak of Lady Everton I am about to tell you much regarding that unfortunate lady. It was for this reason that I have excluded Adolphus from our present conference: for it would be sad and mournful for him to hear the tale of his mother's frailty and dishonour. You, Elizabeth, have acted wisely and well in keeping secret from him the suspicions which yourself and Frank have entertained in respect to Lady Everton; and it will be a matter of serious consideration for us all—perhaps too for Lady Everton herself—whether Adolphus shall ever have the veil torn from his eyes in respect to his mother's secrets. For those suspicions on your part, Elizabeth—those suspicions on your part, Frank—are indeed well founded——Lady Everton is your mother!"

This announcement, although so fully expected, was received in deep silence—but also with deep emotion: and then, as if by a simultaneous ebullition of feeling at thus acquiring the certainty that the lady whom they had seen in their earlier years, and who had wept over them, was indeed their mother,—Elizabeth and Francis threw themselves into each other's arms, mingled their tears, and embraced tenderly. Mr. Gunthorpe rose from his seat and walked to and fro in deep agitation: but suddenly calming his emotions, he resumed his chair, saying somewhat abruptly, "Let me not hesitate any longer to enter upon the narrative of the past. Give me your attention—interrupt me not in its progress—but listen in silence, as I listened yesterday, Elizabeth, to the tale which you revealed to me."

Then, perceiving that the brother and sister were anxiously awaiting the promised narrative, Mr. Gunthorpe related those particulars which will be found in the ensuing chapter.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LADY EVERTON.

"It was in the beginning of the year 1814 that Lord Everton conducted to the altar Alexandrina, sister of Sir John Marston. His lordship was a Colonel in the army—had served for some years in India, where he had greatly distinguished himself—and had amassed considerable wealth. He was forty years of age, but looked considerably older,—his constitution having suffered by the influences of an oriental climate, the fatigues of active service, and the wounds he had sustained. To speak truthfully, he was neither handsome in person nor prepossessing in manners. He had all the imperious habit of command and the authoritative severity of a soldier. He was far more fitted to preside in a camp, than to shine in a drawing-room. Alexandrina was but sixteen when she thus became Lady Everton. She was one of the most beautiful creatures ever seen—intellectually accomplished, of fascinating manners, and of most amiable disposition. Even if her affections had not been engaged to another, her marriage with an individual more than double her age, and whom she could not possibly love, must have been regarded as a cruel sacrifice. But her affections *were* engaged: she loved the Hon Paton Staunton, who was at that time in his thirtieth year. But Mr. Staunton, though the nephew of the then Marquis of Eagledean, appeared not to have any chance of succeeding to the title and estates of his uncle; inasmuch as the Marquis had two sons. Moreover, Mr. Staunton was poor, having but a few hundreds a year: the Marston family was likewise poor; and thus Alexandrina, unable to marry the object of her affections, was sacrificed to the lordly and wealthy soldier.

"Mr. Staunton was a Member of Parliament, and noted for the extreme liberality of his political opinions: he was at the time the only man in the House of Commons who dared raise his voice to assert that the people had rights from which they were most unjustly debarred—that the country was ruled by an arrogant, a selfish, and a rapacious oligarchy—and that what was termed 'British freedom' was one of the most detestable of mockeries. Now, his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean was a staunch Tory: he hated his nephew Paton Staunton for his republican notions,—while on the other hand, Mr. Staunton finding that his narrow-minded relative would not permit liberty of conscience, proudly forbore from asking him any favour. It was therefore in consequence of Mr. Staunton's poverty and want of fine prospects, that Alexandrina Marston was hurried to the altar to become the bride of another man.

"In 1816, two years after the marriage, Adolphus was born. In the course of a few months the affairs of India became so threatening, and some of the native princes obtained such successes over the British troops, that it was found necessary to confer the command of the Anglo-Indian army upon an officer of tried experience, skill and valour. The Government of the day offered the post to Lord Everton: he accepted it and, with the rank of General, proceeded to India. It cost him no considerable pang to leave his young wife and new-born child: for he was a man whose ambition towered high above all the softer feelings of humanity. It would however be alike untruthful and unjust to affirm that he experienced no emotion at all on parting from them. About the same time that this appointment took place, the Marquis of Eagledean died, his elder son succeeding to the title; and in a few months after this, an accident occurred which all in a moment produced a remarkable change in the position and circumstances of the Hon. Paton Staunton. The new Marquis of Eagledean, with his brother—both young men—were upset in a boat on the Thames near Twickenham, and were drowned. They were unmarried—and thus Paton Staunton abruptly received the intelligence that he had become Marquis of Eagledean, with large estates and a revenue of thirty thousand a year.

"From the time of Alexandrina's marriage with Lord Everton, she and Paton had not met. Soon after her husband's departure for India, she became attached as principal lady-in-waiting to the Princess Sophia; and at one of the receptions given by that Princess, in her apartments at St James's Palace, she met the former object of her affection, who had recently become Marquis of Eagledean. That meeting was an interesting one,—one full of a touching pathos and of sorrowful reflections for both: inasmuch as they soon discovered that their mutual love had abated not—but was, if possible, stronger than ever. They could not help thinking that if only two or three short years had been allowed to elapse ere Alexandrina was disposed of in marriage, she might have accompanied to the altar the individual who had won her heart and whose position in life had been destined to undergo so remarkable a change. That meeting led to others. Alexandrina's husband was far away—she did not love him—she scarcely even respected him, because she felt that she had been dragged as his victim to the altar: she knew that her loveliness had served as a chaplet to be interwoven amidst the laurels which adorned his brow. The Marquis of Eagledean remained unmarried—he had vowed never to marry—his heart cherished the image of Alexandrina: and she knew all this. Their meetings did not continue innocent: their mutual passion was above control: they were culpable. In a short time Lady Everton found that she was in a way to become a mother. She made a confidante of her principal lady's-maid, Mrs. Burnaby, who was a widow, and a trustworthy person. I should moreover observe that she was a reduced gentlewoman at the time she first entered Lady Everton's service—that she was well educated—and altogether the most eligible female for the important trust to be reposed in her. But it was necessary to admit others into Alexandrina's confidence;—and the housekeeper at Everton Park, likewise a discreet and kind-hearted woman was one. Another was the maid next in rank to Mrs. Burnaby; and then came the medical man who attended upon the household at the Park. But all the arrangements were so well settled, and the persons engaged were so trustworthy, that Alexandrina's position remained unsuspected by the world; and in due course a daughter was born. This was in 1818. The cottage near Tottenham had been already hired and furnished; and a wet-nurse was engaged. To that abode did Mrs Burnaby repair with the infant, on whom the name of Elizabeth Paton was bestowed.

"After this event the Marquis of Eagledean quitted England, with Alexandrina's full concurrence: for they found that, considering the strength of their mutual love, such separation was necessary for her honour and security. But this parting was indeed most painful, and required all their strength of mind for its accomplishment. For six years did the Marquis remain on the Continent, chiefly in France: but at the expiration of that time business compelled him to return to England. He believed that he had so far conquered the romantic ardour of his love for Alexandrina, that they might now meet as friends. He wrote to her: and she expressed in reply a similar opinion. They did meet: and for some short time they exercised so powerful a control over their feelings that they never touched upon the topic of their love. And yet they both knew that they were standing again upon the edge of a precipice: they both felt that so far from time having mitigated the fervour of their devotion towards each other, it continued unextinguishable—immitigable. It was a deathless sentiment, triumphing over time—defying the lapse of years—interwoven with the very principles of their existence. General Lord Everton was still absent in India, where his presence was required. He was amassing wealth—he was gathering fresh laurels—and yet his work, either for his country or himself, appeared to be only half done; for his letters contained no intimation of the probability of an early return to England. If ever there were extenuation for female frailty, surely it existed for Lady Everton under all those circumstances? The man whom she was forced to accompany to the altar, had been for years absent—while that other man to whom her heart's first and only affections were given, was once more present, and the opportunities for their meeting were frequent. They were again culpable: again did Lady Everton find herself in a condition to become a mother; and again, with the assistance of Mrs. Burnaby and the others who were in the former secret, was a child born. This was in the year 1826. The infant was conveyed away to the cottage; and on him the name of Francis Paton was bestowed.

"There was now another separation. Alexandrina and the Marquis, bitterly deploring the past, resolved that the future should remain untainted by criminality. He went abroad again, well nigh broken-hearted at the necessity for bidding farewell to the object of his first and only love, and at the anguished state of mind in which he had left her. It was even agreed between them that there should not be the slightest epistolary correspondence—nothing that should increase the yearning they were but too certain to experience towards each other. What to the Marquis of Eagledean was his lordly title? what his immense wealth? They could afford him no consolation. He had long considered the first as but an empty bauble; and he only valued the latter as a means of enabling him to do good. Eighteen months elapsed; and during this period the Marquis resided in Paris. His time was chiefly employed in visiting the abodes of want and poverty, and ministering to the relief of the sufferers. Wherever he found an aching heart, it became a solace to him to afford condolence: wherever he found honest penury sinking into despair with its vain struggle against the world, it soothed his own soul to be enabled to succour it Nor less did he penetrate into the dens of vice and demoralization, to drag up from those sloughs such unfortunates as would accept the hand stretched forth to their assistance. It was thus, as I have said, that eighteen months passed away; and at the expiration of this period the Marquis of Eagledean read in an English newspaper, that General Lord Everton, having finished his career in India, was resolved to return home. A few days afterwards another paragraph intimated that he might be expected to arrive in London in about five or six months.

"The Marquis of Eagledean now felt it to be a paramount duty to make ample provision for his two children, Elizabeth and Frank He had never seen either of them from the moment of their birth: he dared not see them: he felt that if he were to do so, he should long to have them with him—to take charge of them—to adopt them and acknowledge them as his own. But how could he do this? He would have to bring them up, stigmatized with illegitimacy; and when they should ask him who their mother was, how could he respond to the question? Besides, if he suddenly appeared before the world with those two children acknowledged as his own,—and as illegitimate too, for he dared not pretend that they were otherwise,—wonder would be excited, suspicions might arise, inquiries might take place, and the truth be traced out. It was known to many that he had been Alexandrina's suitor previous to her marriage with General Lord Everton; and as her husband had been for so many years absent, the tongue of scandal would not fail to whisper a surmise which might ultimately be proved the actual truth. No: every possible precaution must be taken to shield Alexandrina's honour from danger and detraction; and the births of those children must therefore remain buried in an impenetrable mystery. Thus was it that the Marquis of Eagledean had never dared to pay even the most stealthy visit to that cottage where his children were kept in the care of Mrs. Burnaby; and this was not the least violence that he was compelled to exercise over his feelings. But now that Lord Everton was on the point of returning from India, the Marquis felt it a paramount duty to give Alexandrina the assurance that the two children would be amply provided for, and that she need experience no anxiety with regard to their future welfare. The Marquis accordingly resolved to pay one more visit to England, in order to settle this business, and then bid his native land a long farewell—if not an eternal one—so that he might avoid the chance of encountering her whose image was enshrined in his heart. But on repairing to England on the occasion, and for the purpose named, he solemnly vowed that he would not seek an interview with Alexandrina. He wrote to her, stating that he was again in London—explaining the purpose for which he was there—imploring her to pardon him for having thus broken the compact mutually agreed upon, that no epistolary correspondence was to take place between them—and requesting only that she would give such suggestions or instructions as she thought fit relative to a mode of settling the fortune he destined for their two children. He declared his intention of devoting the sum of one hundred thousand

pounds to this purpose, so that they might have a fortune of fifty thousand pounds each.

"Alexandrina, who was then staying at Everton Park, which is about twenty miles from London, wrote back promptly to the Marquis of Eagledean—expressing her admiration for what she was pleased to term his noble generosity on behalf of their children, and declaring that his proposal to that effect had tended to relieve her mind from the utmost anxiety. As to the mode of settling the money, she had but little to suggest. She however wished them to be brought up in a comparatively humble though comfortable and respectful manner—but not with any extravagant ideas or elevated notions, which in after-life might lead them to make searching inquiries into the mystery of their birth. Moreover, as they would have to go forth into the world, when they grew up, without the advantage of relations and friends to counsel and advise them,—and as under such circumstances she trembled for their future welfare, dreading lest they should fall into error,—she besought that they might be reared in ignorance of the handsome fortunes to which they would be entitled, so that they would stand the less chance of falling into the hands of designing persons ere they arrived at years of discretion. For Alexandrina rightly considered that it was a fearful thing for a young woman and a young man to enter upon life in a comparative friendless manner, and without having passed through an ordeal of experience to teach them how to value and make a good use of the fortunes which they were to inherit. Therefore did she suggest that they should be brought up in ignorance of the wealth in store for them, until they reached that age at which it might safely be entrusted to their keeping. Having thus expressed her views, she left all the rest to the discretion of the Marquis of Eagledean; and she displayed sufficient strength of mind to forbear from hinting at her desire for an interview.

"I have already said that Alexandrina was staying at Everton Park at the time when this correspondence took place between herself and the Marquis of Eagledean. She had several visitors there at the time. One was her brother, Sir John Marston, accompanied by his wife: for he had very recently been married. There were likewise Lord and Lady Petersfield, who were on intimate terms with the Everton and Marston families. Lord Petersfield at that time presided over the household of the Princess Sophia, in which Lady Everton still retained her situation—though it was rather a nominal than a real one. Another visitor at the Park on the occasion, was Mr. Everton, her brother-in-law. This gentleman was unmarried—of moderate fortune—and supposed to be of rather unsteady habits. Rumour had indeed whispered that he was dissipated and addicted to the gambling-table: but nothing positive was known on these points. In the world he passed for an honourable man; and on account of his social position, he moved in the highest circles. His sister-in-law had never liked him: she often spoke of him with aversion to the Marquis of Eagledean; but as her husband's brother, she was forced to receive his visits with a becoming courtesy. Besides, Lord Everton, previous to leaving England to assume his military command in India, had requested his brother to visit the Park and the other estates from time to time, to assure himself that the stewards and bailiffs performed their duty.

"To resume the thread of my narrative, I must state that one day—shortly after the correspondence of which I have spoken between Alexandrina and the Marquis of Eagledean—her ladyship was seated in the drawing-room at the Park,—her brother, her brother-in-law, and Lord Petersfield being present at the time. Lady Petersfield and Lady Marston, as it appeared, were out riding or walking together, with little Adolphus. The conversation in the drawing-room turned upon the expected arrival of Lord Everton, who was to be in England in the course of a few months. Lord Petersfield—who then possessed a far more courtly affability than has characterized him of late years, since he entered a diplomatic career and assumed its solemn aspect and its studied reserve,—expatiated upon what he regarded, or pretended to regard, as the delight and joy with which her ladyship would welcome her husband home after his long absence. Poor Alexandrina felt deeply distressed. No doubt,—and it was natural enough,—she was smitten with horror and remorse for her past conduct, and experienced a guilty dread at meeting the husband to whom she had proved unfaithful. In short she was so completely overcome by her feelings that she fell back in a sudden swoon. Her brother, Sir John Marston, hastily snatched up a decanter of water, and sprinkled some upon her countenance; while Lord Petersfield and Mr. Everton tore at the bells to summon assistance. But ere any of her ladyship's female dependants had time to reach the room, she began to return to consciousness; and in the dimness and confusion of her first ideas she let fall some expressions which more than half betrayed the fatal secret. Starting up in a sudden access of frenzy—aware of the tremendous inadvertence which she had committed—she gazed upon her brother, her brother-in-law, and Lord Petersfield in a manner which confirmed the suspicions just engendered in their minds. They consigned her to her maids; and heaven alone knows, besides themselves, what took place between those three men when alone together. In the course of the afternoon Sir John Marston repaired to his sister's chamber, and told her frankly that Mr. Everton had searched her writing-desk, and had discovered documentary proofs of her illicit connexion with the Marquis of Eagledean. Poor Alexandrina threw herself at her brother's feet, beseeching he would intercede with Mr. Everton not to expose and ruin her. Sir John Marston assured her that both himself and Lord Petersfield had already exerted their united influence with Mr. Everton to this effect, and that he had promised to throw the veil of secrecy over her guilt—but only on the condition that the Marquis should at once leave England, with the solemn pledge not to revisit its shores for many long, long years. Alexandrina wrote a letter to Lord Eagledean, telling him what had occurred, and beseeching him to give the sacred promise upon which her fate depended. This letter Mr. Everton determined to bear himself to the Marquis, so that he might, as he alleged, be satisfied as to the reply.

"Proceeding at once to London, Mr. Everton called upon the Marquis of Eagledean, who was

plunged into despair at the fearful occurrence which had thus exposed the unfortunate Alexandrina's frailty. The Marquis did not upbraid Mr. Everton for having violated the sanctity of his sister-in-law's desk. He was too anxious to conciliate him. Moreover, he could not help feeling that when once that gentleman's suspicions were aroused, he had a right to adopt any means to discover proofs of the infidelity of his absent brother's wife. Mr. Everton renewed his proposal that if the Marquis would leave England with a solemn promise to remain absent for a long series of years, and to desist from all correspondence with Alexandrina, he would spare the exposure of her dishonour. Lord Eagledean was but too rejoiced to assent to this decision. Indeed, it only embodied the resolve to which his own mind had been previously made up, and which he had expressed in his last letter to Lady Everton. In short, he left himself entirely in the hands of her brother-in-law, Sir John Marston, and Lord Petersfield, to all of whom the fatal secret had thus become known. He even proposed to take the children away with him to some far-off clime, and there bring them up in utter ignorance of the secret of their birth. But to this Mr. Everton would not listen; and he advanced as his reason several arguments similar to those which had constituted Lord Eagledean's own motives for leaving the children completely in the care of Mrs. Burnaby. The settlement of the hundred thousand pounds upon those two children, was next deliberated upon,—as this step was to be taken before the Marquis could leave England. Mr. Everton suggested that the amount should be lodged in the Bank of England, or with the Marquis of Eagledean's own private bankers, in the joint names of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston,—as they two, having become acquainted with the secret, were the most eligible trustees who could be selected. The Marquis entertained no objection to this arrangement. He was well acquainted with Lord Petersfield, whom he believed to be a man of the strictest probity; and with regard to Sir John Marston, it was natural to include him in the trusteeship, he being Alexandrina's brother. An appointment was accordingly made for all four—namely, the Marquis, Lord Petersfield, Mr. Everton, and Sir John Marston—to meet on the following day and discuss the matter further.

"When this interview was over, Lord Eagledean proceeded to consult his bankers, and also his solicitor, upon the best method of carrying out the arrangements,—confessing to them, under their solemn pledge of secrecy, that Elizabeth and Francis Paton were his own illegitimate children: but as a matter of course, Lady Everton's name was kept out of the question. To the solicitor the Marquis explained that he wished certain restrictions to be placed upon the powers of the trustees, so that they should only carry out such instructions as he might think fit to record for their guidance, without affording them even a discretionary control over the fortunes of the children or the children themselves. In thus speaking, the Marquis had in view the suggestions which he had received from Lady Everton, as I have already described them. On the following day the meeting took place between the Marquis, Lord Petersfield, Mr. Everton, and Sir John Marston. Sir John was the bearer of a letter from his sister Alexandrina to the Marquis of Eagledean, and which she had left open that its contents might be seen to be only of a business character. Therein she recapitulated all the suggestions she had previously afforded, and all the apprehensions she entertained for the future welfare of the children. One passage ran somewhat to this effect:—'It is chiefly for our daughter Elizabeth that I tremble. Frank, when he grows up to man's estate, will feel the want of relations and friends far less than his sister. Her sex naturally exposes her to other temptations and more fatal errors. It would be well if on the attainment of her majority, she could be eligibly married—but without in the least degree forcing the natural bent of her affections. It may be deemed a weakness on my part—but it will nevertheless afford me considerable satisfaction, and in after years relieve me of much of the anxiety which will otherwise harass my mind on her account—if by such marriage a real rank could be conferred upon her, so that in the possession of a titled name and an elevated social position, the mystery of her parentage and the obscurity of her name may be lost sight of. With such a fortune as she will possess through your bounty she may well aspire to such a marriage. I do not mean that she is to be dragged to the altar and forced to wed some titled personage: no—heaven forbid! But I should venture to recommend that if a brilliant marriage in accordance with her own feelings can be effected when she attains her majority, her fortune should be placed at her disposal: but on no account should she be permitted to receive more than the interest of her money until she does contract a matrimonial alliance.'

"Such were Alexandrina's suggestions in reference to Elizabeth. Now, although the Marquis of Eagledean himself despised aristocratic titles, and cared nothing for the one which he himself bore, he was nevertheless prepared to adopt the wishes of the unhappy Alexandrina: and to this effect did he express his intentions to Lord Petersfield, Sir John Marston, and Mr. Everton. They offered no objection; and when the meeting broke up, he repaired to his solicitor for the purpose of giving him final instructions with regard to the trust deed. It will perhaps take some little trouble to explain in lucid terms the details of this deed: but the task must be attempted. In the first place Lord Eagledean undertook to lodge the sum of one hundred thousand pounds in his bankers' hands, to be retained by them for the benefit of Elizabeth and Francis Paton, and in the trusteeship of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston. He apportioned fifty thousand pounds to be Elizabeth's fortune, and fifty thousand pounds to be the fortune of Francis,—together with all the accumulations of interest which might remain for both after the annual deduction of four hundred pounds for their joint maintenance until they should become entitled to their fortunes. The deed provided that should either die, the other was to become entitled to the whole amount; and that should they both die, the amount was to revert to himself (the Marquis of Eagledean) or to his heirs. In respect to the fortune of Elizabeth, he introduced the following provisions into the deed:—that if on the attainment of her twenty-first year, she contracted a marriage with some eligible and proper person,

who by his rank and social position could place her upon a high standing, and confer upon her an honourable name, she was at once to receive possession of her fortune: but that so long as she remained unmarried, she was merely to receive the interest, the capital remaining in the bankers' hands. Or again, if she contracted a marriage which in the opinion of her two guardians was derogatory and unworthy, she should still receive only the interest of the money, without any power over the capital; and on no account was the fortune to be settled on her husband, or alienated from her own possession. In respect to Francis, the Marquis of Eagledean provided by the trust-deed that on the attainment of his twenty-first year, he should become possessed of the full annual interest of his fortune: but that he should not enter upon the enjoyment of the capital until the attainment of his twenty-fifth year. Moreover, the bankers were charged not to pay over the respective fortunes without receiving at the time satisfactory proof that the above-mentioned conditions were duly complied with.

"Such was the nature of the trust-deed drawn up, and which, as a matter of course, was far more explicit in its details than the sketch which I have just given. It necessarily took several days to complete all these arrangements,—during which interval the Marquis of Eagledean was compelled to remain in England; but as Alexandrina continued to reside at Everton Park, they did not meet. Nor did he make the slightest attempt to see her: for he felt that it would be most unbecoming and indelicate to do so under existing circumstances. At length the business was concluded—the necessary documents were signed—the money was deposited in the bankers' hands—and the Marquis of Eagledean quitted England. He repaired to Germany, and settled himself at Baden. Some few months afterwards he read in an English newspaper of the death of the Hon. Adolphus Everton, son of Lord and Lady Everton, aged twelve years, and very soon after that, he read an account of the return of his lordship to England. Deeply did he dread what might be the result of the meeting between Alexandrina and her husband: she had already betrayed her secret in a swoon—the same frightful accident might occur again. But no: it did not appear that there was any ground for this apprehension,—inasmuch as the English newspapers frequently made mention of Lord and Lady Everton; and thus, as their names were coupled in the record of their movements, it was to be inferred that they lived together without a suspicion on her husband's part of his wife's dishonour. But Lord Everton had not been many months in England, ere death overtook him; and when the Marquis of Eagledean read the account of his demise, it was with a feeling that can be better imagined than described. Oh! might he not now hope that, after the usual period of widowhood, Alexandrina would bebome his wife? He however remained in Baden, considering that it would be the height of indelicacy and impropriety to present himself to Lady Everton too soon after her husband's death. A year thus elapsed; and the Marquis now thought that it would be no longer indiscreet to return to England. But then arose in his mind the memory of that solemn pledge he had given to remain absent a long series of years. Perhaps it was straining a point to consider that the interdiction continued valid after Lord Everton's death: but still the Marquis of Eagledean was punctilious upon the subject—and he resolved to write to the brother, who had assumed the title, and ascertain his feeling upon the subject. In due course an answer was received. Lord Everton (as I had better call him for distinction's sake, although he has all along been a base usurper) wrote a long letter, in which he declared that he had consulted his sister-in-law with regard to the present state of her feeling towards the Marquis, and that she had vowed to pass the remainder of her life in widowhood, as an atonement to the memory of him whom she had dishonoured. Lord Everton went on to say in his letter, that he himself considered such atonement to be strictly due to the memory of his deceased brother; and he insisted that the Marquis of Eagledean should adhere faithfully to the solemn pledge: namely, to remain absent from England. Lord Eagledean was cruelly afflicted by the contents of this letter: yet he felt persuaded that Alexandrina was acting under the coercion of her brother-in-law, even if she had been consulted at all in the matter. He therefore wrote to Alexandrina, explaining everything that Lord Everton had said, and requesting a frank and unreserved avowal of her own sentiments. He appealed to her, in the name of that fervid love which for so many years they had experienced for each other—he enjoined her by all the circumstances of the past, not to send him a reply which would banish hope from his breast—and he suggested that if her brother-in-law still insisted on the fulfilment of the pledge of self-expatriation, she might join him on the Continent, where their hands could be united in matrimony. He said that he was well aware he was already violating one part of his pledge, which had been to the effect that all correspondence should cease between them: but he pleaded as an excuse the altered circumstances of their relative position arising from her husband's death. He concluded by declaring that upon her response depended all his future conduct towards her: for that if she, by her own accord, reiterated what her brother in-law had already said to her, he should, as a man of honour and delicacy, regard her decision as final, and as one too solemn and sacred to admit of any additional appeal on his part.

"Most anxiously did the Marquis of Eagledean await the reply to this letter. It came at the expiration of a few weeks: it proved a death-blow to his hopes: the decision was adverse to his fondest expectation! In this reply Lady Everton assured him that the death of her husband had awakened her to the sense of the grievous wrong she had done him—that her peace of mind was destroyed for ever—that her happiness was annihilated—and that were she even to see the Marquis again, his presence would drive her to despair. She conjured him to study, as well as he was able, to banish her image from his mind: or, if he must still continue to think of her, that he would only regard her in the light of a friend sincerely wishing him well, but whom he must never see again. She repeated what her brother-in-law had said—to the effect that by crushing within her bosom all inclination to enter the marriage-state again, she might make some atonement to the spirit of her departed husband, and

that as she had proved unfaithful to him in life, she would prove faithful to his memory after death. She assured the Marquis that she penned that letter of her own accord—without coercion—and even without the knowledge of Lord Everton; that its contents were the spontaneous effusion of her own heart, dictated by a religious piety of feeling, which she implored him not to disturb. The Marquis of Eagledean submitted to this decision: but he did not believe that Alexandrina was a free agent when she wrote that letter. Nevertheless, if she were indeed under the coercion of her brother-in-law, he saw that it must be through a threat that her past conduct should be exposed to the world; and the Marquis was prepared to make any sacrifice of his own feelings, and to consent that she should do the same on her part, rather than see her name dragged through the mire of opprobrium, scorn, and dishonour. He felt assured that Everton was a villain; but Alexandrina was too completely in his power to permit the possibility of his being thwarted. Nevertheless, deeply—Oh! most deeply, did he compassionate that woman whom he loved so tenderly and so enduringly; and it cost him a severe struggle and many a bitter pang, to abstain from flying back to England and imploring her to dare all consequences—exposure, shame, and the ruin of her reputation—rather than consent to an eternal severance. Yet he *did* exercise this mastery over himself; and from that instant the whole aspect of the world was completely changed to the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Leaving Germany, the Marquis repaired to Italy, and settled himself at Naples. There he assumed another name—the name of a civilian. He thus laid aside his rank in order that he might dispense with the train of attendants, the pomp, the splendour, and the ceremony, which it would have been necessary to support had he maintained that rank. At Naples he dwelt in a private manner,—avoiding society, and using his immense wealth in doing good to the utmost of his power. Years passed on—and with his mind, so did his person change. Care and sorrow altered his countenance; and at length it became impossible to recognise in him the once handsome and fascinating Marquis of Eagledean. For those who knew him many, many long years ago, can truthfully aver that he *was* both handsome in person and fascinating in manners; and if they beheld him *now*, they would not entertain the slightest suspicion of his identity. But as those years of self-expatriation passed on, the tone of his mind acquired a degree of resignation which prevented him from falling into complete cynicism and misanthropy. Nay, more—he even learnt to smile again at times—to put on a cheerful aspect—and to deport himself with a blunt good-humour. His habits had naturally become eccentric from the secluded life he had led for so long a period; and indeed, it is often in eccentricity on the part of old men, that the sense of past cares and sorrows either becomes merged or else finds its peculiar expression.

"Yes: years passed—those years which so completely altered the mind, the habits, and the personal appearance of the Marquis of Eagledean. At length he resolved to pay a visit to England. He had several reasons for this determination, to which he did not however arrive suddenly and in a moment of eccentricity. He had received many evil accounts concerning his nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, the presumptive heir to his title and estates. These reports had reached him through indirect channels: for Lady Macdonald, Lord Harold Staunton's aunt, was too indulgent towards her nephew to write any particulars very materially to his prejudice. Therefore the Marquis resolved to visit London and ascertain for himself the truth of those rumours. There was another reason. Lady Macdonald had informed him that his niece, Lady Florina Staunton, was contracted to Lord Saxondale. Now, through the same channels which had conveyed to the Marquis of Eagledean the irregularities of Lord Harold Staunton, intelligence had reached him of a similarly prejudicial character in respect to Lord Saxondale. Here again did he resolve to judge for himself. And last, but not least, he experienced an anxiety to make inquiries concerning the welfare of his children—those children for whom he had made such ample provision. He knew not indeed whether they were alive: he had communicated not with Lord Petersfield—nor with Sir John Marston: the solicitor who prepared the trust-deed, had long been dead;—and many years had elapsed since the Marquis held any communication with those particular bankers in whose hands the money was lodged. It must not be thought that he had ceased to reflect with tenderness upon those children: the truth is, he dared not take any step which should recall too vividly all the incidents of the past. Convinced that he had entrusted their destiny to honourable men, and that the provisions of the deed were so carefully arranged as to ensure their welfare, his mind had been easy upon those points. Yet when he resolved to return to England, the intent of making inquiries concerning his son and daughter naturally entered into his plans. He came to England about two months back; and if he did not instantaneously enter upon these inquiries, it was because it suited his purpose, for several reasons, to maintain a strict *incognito* and pass under the assumed name he had for so many years borne upon the Continent. With that assumed name he did not at first choose to call upon Lord Petersfield; and he therefore postponed that proceeding until he might think fit to resume his rank again. But I can say no more at present——My feelings are overpowering me——You know all!"

With these words Mr. Gunthorpe extended his arms towards Elizabeth and Francis Paton; and they, throwing themselves upon their knees before him, looked up with tearful countenances and ineffable emotions into his face, adown which the tears were likewise falling thick and fast.

"Yes, my dear children," he said in tremulous tones: "I am your father—I am the Marquis of Eagledean!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

DISCOURSE.

Half-an-hour elapsed,—half-an-hour, during which there was poured forth a tide of emotions which no language can depict—a flood of feelings which no pen can describe. They had so much to

say to each other——that father, that daughter, and that son,—so many questions to ask, so many responses to give, and all interrupted by so many fresh embraces and tenderest caresses! But at the expiration of this interval, they recovered a degree of calmness; and then the Marquis of Eagledean reminded Elizabeth and Frank that they had many subjects for serious deliberation.

"Listen to me attentively, my dear children: for Adolphus may return,—and we must not, at least for the present, suffer him to learn all that has been taking place. I must still be known for yet a little while as plain *Mr. Gunthorpe;* and ye must both exercise the most rigid command over your feelings, so as not to betray the degree of relationship in which you stand towards me. Yes ——I must continue my *incognito* for the present, until I have seen Lady Everton. With her shall I consult——yes, we shall meet and deliberate as friends——whether Adolphus shall be left in ignorance of the affinity of your two selves unto him. Consider, my children, how difficult and how dangerous is this point. If he be told to regard you, Elizabeth, as a sister—and you, Frank, as a brother—it will be of course necessary to explain to him the history of his mother's frailty. Perhaps—and it is most probable—indeed it is most natural—that she will implore the secret to be maintained, so that she may not have to blush in the presence of her own son. I shall proceed into Wales alone in the first instance, and obtain an interview with her. It will even be better for Adolphus not to accompany me. I will break to her the circumstance that he is alive——if she herself be indeed ignorant of it. In short, upon my interview with Lady Everton so much depends that my *incognito* must be preserved, and it must not be known that it is the Marquis of Eagledean

who is thus visiting her in her retirement. Remember therefore, my dear children, that you treat me for the present as plain Mr. Gunthorpe—as your friend, and not as your father—as your benefactor, working out an eccentric whim which has made him take a fancy to you both, and not as the parent who in due time will ensure your worldly welfare. Now, have you both strength of mind to master your feelings in the presence of others?"

Elizabeth and Frank both gave the requisite assurances; and the Marquis resumed his discourse.

"The vile and atrocious treatment which you have both received at the hands of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston, can be easily accounted for. There can be no doubt that from the very first, those two men came to an understanding with each other; and doubtless also with the full connivance and concurrence of the usurper Everton himself. Indeed, it is not difficult to conceive that Sir John Marston said to that villain Everton, '*Leave me and Petersfield to appropriate to ourselves the fortunes of these children; and you on your side play your own game to become possessed of the title and estates properly belonging to Adolphus.*' Then, when you came of age, Elizabeth, a husband bearing a noble name was found for you; and no doubt the document which you signed, and over which the notary spread his blotting-paper, was a general release to your guardians, and an acknowledgment of the receipt of your fortune. On the presentation of that document to the bankers, the money would be paid over to them. In respect to yourself, Frank, there can be no difficulty in reading the mystery. A tale of your death was invented, so that your fortune devolved to your sister; and by virtue of the same deed which she had previously signed—or perhaps by a forgery—your fortune likewise fell into the hands of the villains Petersfield and Marston. Indeed, there must have been forgeries committed, — forgeries of documents to prove your death; and it is but too evident that the schoolmaster at Southampton was well bribed to enter into the plot. That you, Elizabeth, should have been led to believe in your brother's death, was likewise necessary to the carrying out of the villanous scheme: for it is clear that Sir John Marston has been all along afraid lest you should by some means or another obtain a clue to the fraud which had been practised towards yourself, and follow it up to detect that which had likewise been perpetrated towards your brother. That when you married the Marquis of Villebelle, Sir John Marston should have stipulated with you both for your immediate severance, was likewise a necessary precaution: for if you had lived together as husband and wife, you would have told Villebelle all the circumstances of your past history—and he would have maintained his right to receive from Sir John Marston a full explanation of the circumstances attending so mysterious a marriage. And that Sir John Marston should the other day have endeavoured to prevent the Marquis of Villebelle from contracting a second marriage, with the Hon. Miss Constance Farefield, is likewise easily explained. For if the bankers learnt that you were alive, while the Marquis contracted this second marriage, they would suspect there had been some foul play in respect to the first: they would demand explanations of Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston—they might follow up the clue—and exposure would follow. No wonder indeed was it that Marston should have allowed you four hundred a year, considering the immensity of the fortune he had robbed you of,—considering also his anxiety to prevent you from instituting disagreeable inquiries. But let all that pass. Petersfield and Marston possess the secret of your mother's shame, and they must not be driven through base revenge to drag all the circumstances of the past before the world!"

The Marquis paused; and after a few moments' reflection, he continued his discourse.

"Perhaps you are surprised that I did not reveal myself to you yesterday, Elizabeth, after you unfolded the narrative of your past life: or that I did not tell you who I was ere I commenced my own narrative just now. But it was so much easier for me to develop all the incidents of the past in the form of a mere narrative, than if I had at once thrown off the disguise and spoken of myself in the first person. Yes—it was less painful to tell the tale as if it were the biography of another, and not mine own! But there was a moment yesterday, Elizabeth, when I was about to breathe the one word which would have told you who I was. It was when you besought me so earnestly to speak that one word! And it would have been spoken, had not you, Frank, together with Adolphus, returned to the cottage at the time. But now at last you know everything; and let me hope, my dear children, you do not feel that you ought to blush for the author of your being, because he led your mother into frailty!"

Neither Elizabeth nor Frank gave any verbal reply to this question: but a still more eloquent response was afforded by the manner in which they precipitated themselves into their father's arms, bestowing upon him the most endearing caresses.

"This is a happiness," he continued, "which, had any one predicted it to me but a few weeks back—or even only a few days—I should not have believed that it was possible. Not but that I anticipated a feeling of delight in meeting my children, if they were still alive and to be found: but I thought not that my own nature remained susceptible of such unalloyed and ineffable bliss. I feared that it was warped by past sorrows—changed by the afflictions of other years—rendered morbid and unhealthy by various eccentricities. I find that it is not so; and I love you, my dear children—Oh, I love you, with all the gushing effusion which the most youthful father could possibly experience when straining his offspring in his arms!"

There was another long pause; and when the feelings of the father, the daughter, and the son had subsided into calmness again, they began to converse relative to Adolphus.

"You have told me, Elizabeth," said the Marquis of Eagledean, "that in accumulating all possible proofs of that villain Everton's guilt, together with the identity of Adolphus as the son of the late General Lord Everton, you had it in view to bring the base usurper to a private and amicable settlement—so that a public scandal, in which her ladyship's name might by chance be painfully brought in, should be avoided. You have acted wisely and well. All your proceedings have been marked by

the most delicate consideration, and characterized by the soundest judgment. It is now for me to take the work out of your hands. I will repair at once to Beech-Tree Lodge, in the hope of finding Mr. Everton there:—for *Mr. Everton* he assuredly is, and his title of *Lord* is a monstrous usurpation. So soon as Adolphus returns in the carriage, I will repair without delay to the village of Hornsey."

Half-an-hour after this conversation — it being now about one o'clock in the day, and Adolphus having returned—the Marquis of Eagledean proceeded to Beech-Tree Lodge, and asked first of all for Theodore Barclay. This individual proved to be the footman to whom the inquiry was addressed; and the Marquis hurriedly demanded whether Lord Everton was at the Lodge? The response given by Barclay was that his master was exceedingly ill and confined to his chamber—that he would see no one, the physician having ordered that he should be kept as quiet as possible.

"Nevertheless, he must see me," said the Marquis, slipping some pieces of gold into Theodore's hand. "I come from Mrs. Chandos."

"Ah!" ejaculated Barclay. "I understand. Fortunately Mr. Bellamy is not at home at this moment, and I can take you up to his lordship's room. What name shall I announce?"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," replied the nobleman. "Be quick: I am desirous of seeing your master at once."

Theodore accordingly led the way up the staircase, and conducted the Marquis of Eagledean to a handsomely furnished bed-chamber on the second storey. Gently opening the door, he said, "My lord, a gentleman—Mr. Gunthorpe—desires most particularly to see you."

"I will see no one," ejaculated a voice from within: but the Marquis of Eagledean entered the room—and Theodore Barclay, closing the door, retreated down stairs.

Everton was seated in an arm-chair, near the bed from which he had only recently risen. His emaciated form was wrapped in a dressing-gown—he looked ghastly pale—the traces of harrowing care and fearful anxiety were plainly visible upon his features—and it was with a mingled angry petulance and affright, that he exclaimed, on beholding the visitor, "What means this intrusion? who are you? what do you want?"

"Tranquillize yourself as well as you can," said the Marquis, deliberately taking a chair opposite the one in which Everton was seated: "for we have business of importance to discuss."

"But who are you?" again demanded the sick man: and he gazed with increasing apprehension upon this visitor, who appeared so determined to maintain his position in the chamber.

"You have heard my name announced," replied the Marquis: "is it unfamiliar to you?"

"Gunthorpe? I do not know it. Who are you? Why don't you speak out plainly at once? You see that I am ill—that I cannot bear excitement——"

"The name of Gunthorpe is then unknown to you?" said the Marquis. "Am I to conclude that neither Lord Petersfield nor Sir John Marston have acquainted you with the interview that took place between them and me the day before yesterday?"

As Lord Eagledean mentioned those names, a still more ghastly expression gathered upon the countenance of the wretched invalid, mingled with a still more agonizing affright. He gazed wistfully and with feverish anxiety upon the Marquis, as if to study the lineaments of his countenance, or read therein the exact purport of his visit: but it was evident enough that he did not recognize Lord Eagledean—so changed indeed was the personal appearance of this nobleman from what it was when he and Everton had last met, more than sixteen years back!

"I will at once set your mind at rest," said the Marquis, "so far as I am enabled to do so—and far more perhaps, than you deserve. All your guilt is known——"

"My guilt?" echoed the invalid: and his emaciated form quivered with a cold convulsive spasm. "But you spoke of Petersfield and Marston——"

"And I have likewise," added Lord Eagledean, solemnly, "to speak of your nephew Adolphus—the rightful heir to the estates and title which you have usurped!"

"It is false—all false!" cried the old man vehemently: "he is a pretender—an impostor Adolphus died and was buried——"

"Silence!" interrupted the Marquis sternly: "persist not in those foul falsehoods. But hear me. I come to offer you the means of settling all these matters peaceably, tranquilly——I cannot use the word amicably——but, I may say, with as little scandal and as little exposure as may be possible under the circumstances. Now, will you make this reparation? will you make this atonement? or will you dare the vengeance of the law?"

"But who are you?" again inquired the miserable old man, looking aghast—a most abject picture of physical decay and moral ignominy.

"I am one possessing sufficient knowledge of the past to drag all your crimes to light, if you force me to that alternative. But I do not seek it: I have already given you this assurance. If with that palsied hand of your's," continued the Marquis solemnly, "you persist in clutching the coronet which you plucked from the brow of its rightful possessor, you will speedily exchange this well-furnished apartment for a felon's dungeon. Listen to me—do not interrupt me: those passionate ejaculations of your's will produce no effect—unless indeed it be an effect detrimental to yourself. You spoke ere now of the death of Adolphus—his burial——I tell you that it was a monstrous deceit—a detestable imposture! for Adolphus is living—you know that he has escaped from this vile den of yours: and I must tell you that he has found friends——"

"I understand it all," exclaimed Everton, regaining a portion of his lost effrontery. "That crazy young man—a rampant lunatic—has by some means or another got the idea into his head that he is the Adolphus of whom you speak. No doubt there are base and mercenary pettifoggers to be found ready and eager to take up his cause. Perhaps you yourself are the attorney who may have got it in hand? Come, sir—we begin to understand each other: name your price—I don't want law—I am too ill to be troubled with litigation——"

"And this illness of yours," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean indignantly, "has doubtless been brought on by the goading tortures of your evil conscience. No, sir—I am *not* an attorney: nor have I the selfish purposes of a detestable rapacity to

serve. Besides, have you forgotten the allusion I have made to Lord Petersfield and Sir John Marston? and can you not understand that your iniquity in respect to your nephew Adolphus, is not the only villany of your's with which I am acquainted? Was it not by your consent and connivance, that those two men—as base as yourself—appropriated the immense fortune——"

"But I was no party to that trust-deed!" ejaculated the miserable invalid, again trembling all over from head to foot. "My name was not mentioned in it—I had naught to do with the transaction. If Petersfield and Marston have abused their trust, I am not responsible."

"No—you are not responsible legally: but you are morally," replied Lord Eagledean. "On that subject I do not however wish to dwell at present——"

"But who are you? I suppose you are an agent or friend of some one in Italy——"

"Yes: the Marquis of Eagledean. I am his friend," responded the visitor, curtly and drily.

"The Marquis of Eagledean was a villain," exclaimed the invalid,—"the seducer of my sister; and I spared *him*—I spared *her* likewise! I kept their secret religiously—faithfully——"

"Yes—to serve your own purposes. Ah! Mr. Everton——"

"How dare you address me thus? I am Lord Everton—and you cannot disprove my rights. This fabrication in respect to a crack-brained pretender, will not hold good for a moment. Come, sir—tell me who you are, and what you want?"

"Yes: I will tell you what I want in a few words," rejoined the Marquis. "I demand a full confession of your iniquity towards your nephew, and the acknowledgement of his identity. But stop—do not interrupt me! Let me tell you at once that I have obtained proofs of which perhaps you little dream——"

"Proofs?" ejaculated the invalid, endeavouring to assume a tone and look of defiance, but in reality convulsing and writhing in his chair with the tortures of an agonizing suspense.

"Yes—proofs! Upwards of sixteen years ago," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, speaking in a low and solemn voice, "the corpse of a pauper boy, who died in a workhouse, was disinterred from the grave—was removed to Everton Park—and on the same night, Adolphus was brought hither: from which moment he has been kept in a cruel captivity until his providential release a short time ago."

The invalid gave a low moan, and sank back in the chair like one annihilated. His eyes became glassy, as if glazing beneath the touch of death, while he stared in vacant dismay upon Lord Eagledean. This nobleman, fearing that the wretched man was about to give up the ghost, sprang from his seat, and was rushing towards the bell to summon assistance, when Everton cried out, in a half-shrieking, half-imploring voice, "No, no! let no one come! I will do whatever you command—I am in your power—I am at your mercy!"

The Marquis of Eagledean resumed his seat; and the invalid, experiencing a sense of faintness, pointed towards a bottle upon the table, murmuring, "I beseech you—give me some of that cordial."

This request was immediately complied with; and the invigorating, or we should rather say stimulating effect of the liquor was quickly apparent on the part of the invalid. A slight flush, but of a hectic appearance, sprang up on his cheeks, as if painting the ghastliness of death; and his eyes shone with an unnatural lustre.

"I see that you know all," he said, in a low and gloomy voice—and yet he trembled with excitement. "What do you require of me? I have been betrayed—some villain has revealed the secrets of the past——"

"No matter how they came to my knowledge," interrupted the Marquis: "it is for you to make speedy reparation and atonement. A written acknowledgment, signed by your own hand, to the effect that Adolphus is your nephew—the legitimate possessor of the title and estates of Everton—that the tale of his death was false——"

"But if I do all this," said the miserable man, "it will consign me to a dungeon—it will subject me to terrible penalties——"

"Which you richly deserve—but which shall be spared you. No: horrible and unnatural—perfidious and execrable, though your conduct has been, no vindictive feeling shall pursue you. You will sign the needful paper to put Adolphus in possession of his rights: but before any use shall be made of that document, you may fly to the Continent—there to linger out the rest of your existence. Some forms and ceremonies will have to be observed in the House of Lords to substantiate the claims of Adolphus; and it will therefore be impossible for the history of your guilt to be altogether saved from publicity. But its consequences you may escape by self-expatriation; and I know the members of the British Aristocracy well enough," added the Marquis of Eagledean with a scornful sneer, "to be assured that the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords will not suffer more of the details of your guilt to ooze out to the public knowledge, than they can possibly help. They at least have the merit of shielding to the extent of their power the crimes of any one of their own order, lest the effects of the scandal should redound upon them all!"

"But this paper—this document," said the invalid, quivering nervously,—"who is to draw it up? when is it to be signed?"

"I will draw it up at once—and you shall sign it now," was the response of the Marquis. "Rest assured I shall be found a competent witness, when the time comes, to present the papers before the Committee of Privileges. At all events, that is our affair—not your's. Where shall I find writing-materials?"

The invalid pointed to a desk which stood upon a side-table: the Marquis proceeded thither—opened the desk—sat down and began to write. For about a quarter of an hour did he thus remain occupied, during which interval the thoughts of Mr. Everton were of such a harrowing anguished description that they were almost a sufficient punishment for the tremendous iniquities which had stained his past career. When Lord Eagledean had finished drawing up the deed, which embodied a general confession of Everton's proceedings in respect to his nephew, he read it slowly and deliberately over to that person: then handing him the pen, he bade him sign it.

"Is it absolutely necessary?" asked the invalid,

gazing up with appealing earnestness into Lord Eagledean's countenance: "can no mercy be shown me? May I not at least retain my rank until death makes its appearance? Consider, Mr. Gunthorpe, —or whoever you may be, for methinks you are more than what you seem—consider, I beseech and implore you—I am not long for this world. I feel as if the hand of death were already upon me. At the outside I cannot live many months—perhaps not many weeks: my days are doubtless numbered —I have experienced a shock, caused by the deliverance of that young man——But, Oh! reflect, I conjure you—may not some mercy be shown me?—for I spared *his* life!"

"Mr. Everton," interrupted the Marquis sternly, "to what a pitiable condition must you be reduced —to what an abysm of moral degradation are you fallen—when you have to congratulate yourself that you had not the courage to become a murderer? Do you not see, sir, that the hand of Providence was in all this? You were villain enough to play the part of usurper—you would deprive your nephew of his just rights—you could for years retain him in a miserable captivity, treating him as a lunatic until you almost made him one—you could snatch him away from his mother—you could mercilessly separate the parent from her son: all this were you villain enough to do—but you lacked the boldness to strike the blow effectually! Do not think for a moment, sir, that I believe it was through any merciful consideration on your part that you spared your nephew's life. No: I understand your character full well. With all your iniquity you were a coward; and it was heaven's will that this cowardice on your part should become the means of saving you from a still darker crime than any you have perpetrated. Take no credit to yourself that you are not a murderer: you possessed the will, but you lacked the courage. And now, sir, without farther entreaty on your part—without farther hesitation—sign this paper!"

The invalid—overawed, dismayed, and crushed by the withering language addressed to him by one who spoke with the authority of an avenger, and yet an avenger who was showing mercy—the invalid, we say, took the pen in his trembling hand, and prepared to sign. But he laid it down, and requested that another glass of the cordial might be given to him. This desire was promptly fulfilled; and under the influence of the stimulant, he affixed his name to the foot of the document, in a firmer hand than could have been anticipated.

"Now, sir," observed Lord Eagledean, consigning the paper to his pocket-book, and taking up his hat, "I have little more to say. The promise I have given you shall be kept. No use shall be made of this document until I learn that you are safe upon the Continent. Nor am I so cruel and inhuman as to wish that you precipitate your departure in a manner that may endanger your life. Perhaps, now that you have made this atonement—now that you are acquainted with all the worst that is to befal you, and that your mind must be relieved from the most torturing apprehensions as to the course which Adolphus might have adopted in making good his claims—you may recover some degree of mental tranquillity, which will assist you towards convalescence. Your departure need not be prejudicially hurried: but it must not be inordinately prolonged. And one word more. If, when Adolphus assumes possession of his ancestral estates, you yourself are reduced to poverty, a sufficient provision shall be made for the remainder of your life: and thus, sir, must you feel that much good is being returned for an immensity of evil—and that you are treated with that mercy which you never extended to others!"

With these words the Marquis of Eagledean took his departure; and descending the stairs, he was about to enter his carriage, when Theodore Barclay, approaching him, said, "Mr. Gunthorpe, does my master know that I have given any information concerning him?"

"No: but he may possibly suspect it. You would do well to leave his service at once. Here is my card: you can call upon me a fortnight hence —when something shall be done for you."

The footman expressed his thanks; and the Marquis of Eagledean was whirled away from Beech-Tree Lodge towards Stamford Manor.

On reaching his house, he found Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank walking together in the front gardens. Immediately joining them, he related what had taken place between himself and Mr. Everton: for to the grade of a civilian had the usurper sunk down again, being divested of his noble rank. The Marquis displayed the document which he had compelled that individual to sign, but to which he had not as yet appended his own attesting signature. He then represented to Adolphus his intention of departing on the ensuing morning for Wales, in order to obtain an interview with Lady Everton.

"You must permit me, my dear friend," he said to Adolphus, "to manage the whole of this business after my own fashion. For several reasons, which I cannot now explain, it is better that you should not accompany me. But rest assured that the shortest possible delay shall be allowed to elapse ere you are permitted to fold your mother in your arms. Perhaps she may accompany me back to London—or perhaps I may send off a messenger to require your immediate presence in Wales: I know not as yet how all this may be. But tell me, are you satisfied to leave it to my management?"

"Oh! my dear sir—my excellent friend," exclaimed Adolphus, pressing with effusion the hand of the Marquis, "how could I be otherwise?"

In the evening the Marquis gave instructions to the dependants of his household that during his absence they were to regard Miss Paton as their mistress, and obey her instructions in all things. Retiring to his library, he wrote a few letters—one of which was to William Deveril, to the effect that urgent business would take him out of town for a short time; but he promised that he should return in time for that day on which our young hero had been promised a visit from the mysterious woman whom he had saved from drowning in the waters of the Trent.

On the following morning, having taken an affectionate leave of Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus, the Marquis of Eagledean set out upon his journey into Radnorshire.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS MISSIVE.

It was the forenoon of the day after the Marquis of Eagledean's departure from Stamford Manor, that Elizabeth and Frank, having accompanied Adolphus in a walk as far as Mrs. Leyden's cottage, left him there to pass an hour or two with Henrietta, and then continued their own ramble with the intention of calling for him on their way home.

Elizabeth leant upon her brother's arm: she was elegantly dressed—he was handsomely apparelled—and it was a pleasing spectacle to behold that superb young woman and that beautiful youth thus linked together in the firmest bonds of fraternal affection. Elizabeth wore her raven hair in massive bands, which served as an ebon frame for her high and expansive forehead; while an exquisite French bonnet subdued the natural boldness of her features and gave to her looks a certain air of feminine delicacy. Frank,—who, as the reader will remember, had been somewhat indisposed after he first left Lady Saxondale's service,—was now perfectly restored to health; and though he had never much colour upon his cheeks, yet whatsoever bloom was wont to rest thereon had come back again, appearing like the delicate vermeil upon the downy surface of the ripening peach. A tight-fitting frock coat set off the lithe and slender symmetry of his form to the utmost advantage: while in respect to his sister, the dress that she wore, developed, although concealing, the noble proportions of her richly modelled shape. Thus altogether they were a couple—that brother and sister—whom it was impossible to gaze upon without a feeling of interest; and they felt proud of each other. For Frank saw that his sister was a superb woman: while she being so much older than himself, experienced an almost maternal satisfaction and pride in contemplating that beautiful youth who bore the endearing name of brother.

"How changed, my dear Frank," she said, as they rambled along together, "are the circumstances of our position. Does it not all appear like a dream?"

"There have been moments," answered Frank, "when I have hesitated to believe that it was all a reality. Yesterday morning—and this morning too—when first awaking, I sat up in the bed, looking around the splendidly furnished chamber, and wondering whether I indeed saw it with my outward vision, or whether it was a delusion of the fancy. Yes: extraordinary things have taken place within the last few weeks! But the condition of Adolphus has experienced a change as remarkable as our own."

"And is he not happy now?" said Elizabeth: "how devotedly he appears to love that sweet and amiable girl Henrietta! But methought you sighed, Frank?" exclaimed his sister: and stopping suddenly short in the road where they were walking at the time, she gazed attentively upon him. "Ah! my dear brother! the colour mantles upon your cheeks——you have a secret which has been kept back from me?"

"Forgive me, dearest Elizabeth—forgive me," said the youth murmuringly, "It is true—it is true—and I have been wrong to keep that secret from you."

"I do not demand your confidence, Frank," observed Elizabeth, as she slowly walked on again leaning on her brother's arm: "but if you think fit to give it to me, I will bestow either counsel or sympathy in return."

"I know not," resumed Frank, with half-averted countenance and downcast looks, "whether it is really love which I experience——and yet methinks it must be——But it has been sensuously guilty: and——"

"But its object?" said Elizabeth inquiringly, seeing that her brother stopped suddenly short.

"Juliana Farefield," was the response.

"Ah, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter! But if you really love her, Frank, you may aspire to her hand: there is no need for you to be disconsolate," continued his sister: "on the return of our father, you must tell him everything. And yet, my dear brother," she added, speaking more slowly and gravely, "there is this consideration—that if Juliana Farefield beguiled you into becoming the object of a sensual phantasy, she is a being unworthy of a pure affection on your part, because she herself experiences it not towards you."

Francis Paton, recovering from his confusion, proceeded to acquaint his sister, candidly but delicately, with all that had taken place between himself and Juliana. Elizabeth listened in silence—and continued to reflect in silence also, after he had done speaking.

"You tell me that Miss Farefield manifested a deep interest in the tale of your earlier years," she at length said,—"that she treated you with the kindest sympathy—that she expressed the conviction your birth was above the circumstances in which you were then placed. All this seems to argue in favour of a true and sincere love on her part. And yet, could she not have suggested a private marriage? Not being acquainted with her, and therefore being utterly unable to form a correct estimate of her true character and disposition, I know not what to say, or what to advise. She is exceedingly handsome, Frank—is she not?"

"Oh, she is superbly beautiful!" cried the youth in enthusiastic tones: and again did the colour glow upon his cheeks.

"I know not what love is," said Elizabeth: "but I think that I can conjecture the symptoms and principles of the passion. Look into your own heart, Frank: does it cherish Juliana's image? are you frequently—almost constantly thinking of her? Yes, yes—I know that you are! Those abstracted moods which I have so often observed since we were thrown together again, have not been altogether fraught with pain and grief on my account. Doubtless you have sorrowed at being separated from Juliana? your heart has yearned towards her?"

"Yes—for I feel that I love her," replied Frank. "But do you think, dear Elizabeth, that there is any hope of the proud and haughty Lady Saxondale permitting her daughter to wed a youth who once wore a livery in her service?"

"The Marquis of Eagledean," responded Elizabeth proudly, "will give you a fortune, Frank, that will be sufficient to over-rule Lady Saxondale's scruples. Yes—if he cannot give you a noble name, he will at least give you wealth;—and wealth in this country constitutes a social position. Besides, Juliana is not more likely to be swayed by her mother's will,

than Constance herself was. But, ah! now that I reflect—from certain words which our father let drop when he was having a private conversation with me the day before yesterday on the eve of his departure, I gleaned that he entertains no pleasant feeling towards Lady Saxondale. He believes that his nephew Harold Staunton is her ladyship's paramour, and that at her instigation he has done some very bad deeds. However, we must wait till the return of the Marquis ere we can decide upon any step to be taken by yourself in respect to Juliana. Do not be discouraged, dear Frank, by what I have just been saying in respect to Lady Saxondale. Although we have known our dear father but for a few days, we have nevertheless seen enough of him, and likewise experienced ample proofs, to convince us that he will in all things study the happiness of each of us. During the interval that he will remain absent, it is for you to look deeply into your heart—to assure yourself that this is a sincere and permanent affection which you entertain for Miss Farefield; and if you come to the conclusion that the felicity of your life is centred in her, I have no doubt our father will take such measures as shall crown your most fervid aspirations."

"Dearest sister, I thank you—Oh, I thank you for these assurances!" exclaimed Frank. "How rejoiced I am that I have at length revealed my secret to you! Often and often have I been on the point of confessing it. It has wavered upon my lips; —and then I have felt an indescribable confusion—a bashfulness—an apprehension——"

"I understand you, my dear brother," replied Miss Paton with an affectionate look.

"But you, Elizabeth," quickly rejoined Frank,—"is it really possible that *you* have never experienced even the most transient sentiment which might be deemed bordering upon love?"

"Never, Frank! Perhaps you cannot comprehend such a heart as mine: and yet, as I have before told you, it has hitherto escaped even the faintest impression of a tender character."

"I have often seen the Marquis of Villebelle," said Frank: "he is very handsome—possesses a highly intellectual countenance, and fascinating manners. Do you not think, Elizabeth, that if you had lived with him as your husband—if the circumstances of that marriage had not at the time inspired you with an aversion for an alliance that ought only to have been connected with a heart's best and purest affections,—do you not think, I say, that you would have learnt to love that handsome and elegant nobleman?"

"I do not think so, Frank," responded his sister, smiling. "No. My belief is that when a woman first meets the man whom she is destined to love, she experiences some unknown and intuitive feeling which at once points him out as the being who is to exercise a paramount influence over the future years of her life. Such was not the case when I first set eyes upon the Marquis of Villebelle."

"No—because the circumstances were so peculiar," exclaimed Frank: "he appeared before you to the utmost disadvantage, and in a position but little calculated to command either respect or esteem. Had it been otherwise—were you introduced to him in the ordinary manner, meeting him in society and gradually becoming the object of his attentions,—you know not, my dear sister, what would have been the result. And then—there was Count Christoval! You have told me that he was one of the handsomest men you ever beheld in all your life, and that he possessed every intellectual embellishment to aid the advantages of personal beauty——"

"You seem very anxious, my dear Frank," interrupted Elizabeth, laughing gaily, "that I should confess to having been at some time of my life smitten with the sentiment of love."

"Ah, my dear sister," responded the youth; "if you had been, it would now prove so sweet to me to converse with you thereon."

"The heart that loves, then," said Elizabeth, now speaking seriously, "longs to pour forth its thoughts and feelings to another heart beating with kindred emotions? Yes—I am convinced, Frank, from all you have been saying, that you do love Juliana Farefield! Your words convey all the evidences of that affection. But with regard to myself, I can only repeat what I have already told you—that if my soul be ever destined to receive the impression of love, I have not as yet encountered in the world the object who is to inspire the feeling. We were talking of Don Diego Christoval. Remember the many months that I passed in his society—the delicate attentions that he showed me—the mingled vehemence and pathos with which he urged his suit,—and yet I experienced not for him the slightest feeling of love. No: the Count, although so handsome, so fascinating, so intellectual—and although surrounded by so many circumstances of a wildly romantic character but too well calculated to make an impression on a susceptible heart,—yet *he* was not the individual destined to ensnare mine!"

"Then will you never marry, Elizabeth?" asked Frank, bending his ingenuous looks upon his sister.

"Never," she at once responded,—"unless I learn to love tenderly and well. But while thus discoursing, my dear brother," she said, stopping short, "we have been wandering to a greater distance than we at first intended. Ah! what is this?"

The ejaculation that Elizabeth Paton thus suddenly gave forth, was produced by the circumstance of a beautiful carrier-pigeon suddenly descending from the higher regions of the air, and circling three or four times over the spot where she and her brother had halted. The intelligent bird actually appeared to be examining Elizabeth, to assure itself that she was the kind mistress whose hand had been wont to feed it and in whose bosom it had often nestled. Each circle that it made became narrower, and also lower: till, at the expiration of a few moments, it perched upon her shoulder.

"It is one of my own pigeons," she exclaimed,—"one of those that I sent back to Kate Marshall!"—then, as she took the bird in her hands and began caressing it, she said, "It bears a letter. Ah! can I, without a breach of our father's wishes, read its contents? He evidently desired that I should break off all farther correspondence with the Marshalls——and he was right too!"

"Nevertheless," suggested Frank, "there will be no harm in seeing what the billet contains. It may be of importance—and there is no necessity for you to answer it, unless circumstances demand a reply."

"We will read it," said Elizabeth: and she accord-

ingly proceeded to unfasten the little note from beneath the bird's wing.

The moment this was done, the feathered messenger ascended into the air, as if knowing that its mission was accomplished—and was soon out of sight.

"Doubtless that intelligent little creature," said Elizabeth, still hesitating whether to open the letter, "has been to the cottage—and not finding me there, went forth in search of its well-known mistress. But as you have suggested, there will be no harm in seeing what Kate says."

She accordingly opened the billet, the contents of which were in Miss Marshall's handwriting. The ambiguous arrangement of the letters of the alphabet was not observed on this occasion: for Kate no doubt had fancied that, as her friend Lady Bess wrote so positively to declare that she thenceforth dispensed with the service of the carrier-pigeons, she had destroyed the cypher-book for the current year, which indicated the initial letter for each respective day. The note contained the following lines:—

"Dover, August 4, 1844.

"I am rejoiced, my dear friend, that circumstances have so changed with you as to render your future prospects of the brightest character. I know not whether this little missive will reach you: but I risk it. Indeed, I cannot refrain from the endeavour to convey a piece of information which nearly concerns you. A certain person arrived at Dover yesterday, and staid a few hours at our house. His name being known to me, I spoke to him, and found that he has come to England in search of you. You can guess to whom I allude, as I dare not enter into particulars, for fear this note should fall into other hands than yours.

"Your affectionate friend,

"C. M."

"To whom can she allude?" ejaculated Frank, he having read this note simultaneously with his sister.

"I cannot conceive," observed the latter thoughtfully. "Surely——But no: it is scarcely possible! At all events, the note requires not an answer—and I am glad of it; for though I never can forget the kindnesses I have received from the Marshalls, yet in obedience to our father's wishes, all correspondence must henceforth cease between them and me. Come, Frank—let us hasten back to Mrs. Leyden's house: for Adolphus will wonder what has become of us."

The brother and sister accordingly repaired thither, and found Adolphus walking with Henrietta in the immediate vicinage of the dwelling. After Elizabeth and Frank had rested a little while at the cottage, they continued their way, in company with Adolphus, towards Stamford Manor.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening, that Elizabeth Paton rambled forth alone in the grounds attached to the mansion,—Frank and Adolphus remaining in-doors. She was pondering upon the conversation that had taken place in the morning between her brother and herself, and deliberating in her own mind upon the probable course that their father would recommend with respect to Frank's passion for Juliana Farefield. She was likewise reflecting, in its turn, upon the mysterious letter she had received from Kate Marshall. In this meditative mood she reached the palisade that skirted the grounds, and on the opposite side of which there was a road. All of a sudden an ejaculation of enthusiastic joy fell upon her ears, startling her from her reverie. She raised her eyes: with a single bound an individual sprang over the palisade, and alighted in her presence, his countenance beaming with rapture.

Yes—the suspicion which had at first struck Elizabeth Paton on reading Miss Marshall's letter, was now suddenly confirmed: it was Don Diego Christoval who stood before her!

END OF VOLUME I OF THE THIRD SERIES.

THIRD SERIES.

THE

MYSTERIES

OF THE

COURT OF LONDON.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS,

AUTHOR OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SERIES OF "THE MYSTERIES OF LONDON," "THE DAYS OF HOGARTH," "FAUST," "WAGNER, THE WEHR WOLF," "THE CORAL ISLAND," "THE BRONZE STATUE," "THE SEAMSTRESS," "JOSEPH WILMOT," "MARY PRICE," "ELLEN PERCY," "AGNES, OR BEAUTY AND PLEASURE," "KENNETH," "THE RYE HOUSE PLOT," "THE MASSACRE OF GLENCOE," &c.

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VOL. VI.

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THE MYSTERIES

OF

THE COURT OF LONDON.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

THE SPANIARD.

COUNT CHRISTOVAL was now thirty-five years of age; and though somewhat careworn, yet in other respects his countenance was as prepossessing as on the first day when Elizabeth Paton met him amongst the Catalan hills. He wore his moustache—but his beard and whiskers were closely shaven; and their absence made him seem several years younger than he really was. His dark eyes shone perhaps with a more subdued and melancholy lustre than was their wont ere he had learnt to love the English lady:

but now, as he gazed upon her, they beamed with the light of rapturous joy. The brilliant teeth shone between the half-parting lips; and in this moment of his ineffable delight, the rich warm blood of his trans-Pyrenean nature was mantling through the transparent olive of his complexion. He was dressed as a private gentleman: his apparel was handsome, yet in the best possible taste; and the closely fitting frock-coat displayed the fine symmetry of his tall form to its fullest advantage.

Elizabeth Paton quickly recovered from the startled surprise into which the sudden appearance of Don Diego had thrown her; and with the natural generosity of her heart, she chose to lose sight of the forced prisonage she had endured at his hands, and to think only of the kindness and attention received from himself and his associates in the Catalan hills. But while she extended her hand, she nevertheless assumed a certain degree of reserve in gentle rebuke for the unceremonious manner in which he had burst into her presence. Yet it must be confessed that her mien was not exceedingly reproachful—because strong-minded though she were, she was nevertheless sufficiently a woman to feel that his conduct was most flattering to herself.

Addressing him in the French language, she said, "Don Diego, what brings you to England?"

"Your image!" he replied in the English tongue, at the same time carrying her hand to his lips; and kissing it rapturously ere she could withdraw it, he said, "That image which has never once been absent from my mind since you fled from the tower in the wilds of Catalonia!"

Elizabeth gazed upon him with the utmost astonishment: for he was addressing her in the English language,—spoken too with the utmost accuracy and with but so little of a foreign accent that it was barely perceptible. She knew at the time when she was in Spain he was utterly unacquainted with her native tongue; and she naturally marvelled to perceive that he had acquired it to such perfection.

"I have learnt the English language for your sake," he said, with a deep tenderness of voice and a corresponding look—but both alike mingled with a chivalrous respect, just as he was wont to deport himself towards her during her captivity in Catalonia. "And you asked me wherefore I came to England?" he continued: "need you have put that question? But let me put a question to you—and I beseech and implore you to respond to it at once. Have you ever thought of me with kindness since you fled from Spain?"

"I have thought of you with friendship," replied Elizabeth Paton, seriously but frankly; "and within the last few days, when relating my adventures in Catalonia, I have spoken of you in similar terms."

"Friendship!" murmured Count Christoval mournfully: but with a sudden access of hopefulness, he exclaimed, "Yet may not friendship prove the germ of a more tender feeling? I know you are not married—I have every reason to believe that you do not love another——Indeed, I have been assured that you pride yourself on being unsusceptible of love. O Elizabeth! so bright and beautiful a creature as you—to possess a heart that is unsusceptible of love! No, no—it were impossible! it were an anomaly in human nature!—and I am not without the hope that destiny has reserved for me the happiness of thawing that glacial soul of your's!"

"Don Diego Christoval," answered Elizabeth, still speaking seriously, but with a certain degree of kindness in her accents, as well as with the fullest candour in her looks, "it is my firm belief that I never can regard you with any other sentiment than that of friendship. And now, I appeal to the generosity of your nature, and to every feeling of delicacy which must harbour in such a heart as your's, that you will leave me at once. Yon mansion where I dwell, is the house of a benefactor—and I dare not stand the chance of suffering in his estimation. He is absent too, at this moment: but my brother is there—and a very dear friend also—there are numerous servants likewise—I am well known in this neighbourhood——In short, every instant that you remain here threatens to compromise me most seriously. What would be thought if I were seen walking here with a stranger?"

"A stranger to those whom you have named," rejoined the Count reproachfully,—"but no stranger to *you!* Will you not accord me a few minutes,—only a few minutes,—while I tell you all that I have thought—all that I have done—and all that I have hoped, during the four years which have elapsed since last I saw you?"

"Well, then—a few minutes," answered Elizabeth: "and only a few minutes," she added impressively; "because I must not be compromised."

"Oh! this coldness—this coldness!" ejaculated the Count vehemently;—"after I have told you that I came to England expressly to search after you! It is more than I can endure! Have pity upon me, Elizabeth—I beseech you to have pity upon me!—for never in this world was a woman the object of a love so devoted as that which my heart cherishes for you. Love!—it is a passion transcending far all that poets ever dreamt or romancists ever depicted in the form of love!—it is a passion which has become so interwoven with the very principles of my existence, that if it be doomed to prolonged disappointment, it will drive me to put an end to my sorrows and perish in the blood of a distracted suicide!"

The Count spoke with a wild impetuosity, mingled with a solemn earnestness, that for the moment overawed Elizabeth Paton, and even made her afraid. Not afraid for herself—for she was a woman who scarcely knew the name of fear; and there was no Catalonian tower at hand to which she might be conveyed, and where she might be retained captive. But she was afraid on account of that man who loved her with an ardour so indubitable—a depth of passion so sincere—and a constancy so well proven, that she felt this menace of suicide to be no idle nor inconsiderate one.

"Count Christoval," she said, giving him her hand—speaking kindly, but with a half-reproachful look,—"it is not generous of you to address me in these terms. Much as I may pity you—deeply as I may compassionate you—and even flattered and honoured as I may feel by this love of your's—yet a woman's heart is not to be won by passionate threats and impetuous outpourings."

"No!—but her heart is to be won by a devotion love," exclaimed the Count: "and all that I say—

all that I do—all that I menace, must be taken as evidences of that devoted love on my part. Listen to me—I beseech you to listen! You have promised to accord me a few minutes—and I will endeavour to be calm."

"Proceed," said Elizabeth, withdrawing her hand, which he had pressed tenderly and fervidly between both his own. "Let us not linger near this road where passers-by might chance to observe us: we will walk through that shady avenue, where we shall be unperceived from the mansion. You see, Count Christoval, that I am compelled to take precautions,—that I am fearful of being compromised; and I hope therefore you will have some consideration for me."

"Will you have any for me, Elizabeth?" he asked, gazing upon her countenance with a rapture subdued by mournful suspense. "But let me avail myself of the little leisure you are affording me. I will go back to that time when you fled from the tower in Catalonia. On discovering your flight, a frenzy seized upon my brain; for several hours I was like one demented. It appeared to me as if the world contained naught left that was worth living for: and yet, as heaven is my witness, I took no measures to pursue you, or to bring you back. I had hoped that by my unwearied attentions I should have secured your affections. Your flight was a proof that my fondest anticipations had all been in vain. When I recovered some degree of calmness, it was only to fall into a profound melancholy; and there were moments, during the latter part of that day on which your flight was discovered, when I thought of putting a period to my existence. But the circumstances in which my faithful associates were placed, recalled me to immediate activity. I was reminded that the hour had come when I was to learn the result of the negotiations in respect to the captive son of the military commandant of Catalonia. Those terms were favourable: a ransom-money was paid for his release—and immunity was granted to myself and my band for the ensuing three months. But such a change had come over me that I resolved to abandon immediately the life I was leading. I thought to myself that if I were to follow you to England, whither I felt assured you would repair, I might yet succeed in making an impression upon your heart. I thought that when you were free, and no longer regarded me in the light of a gaoler, you would forget whatsoever injustice you had sustained at my hands: while, on the other hand, you would remember the many proofs of devoted love that I had given you. I took leave of my comrades—I abandoned to them the greater share of the spoils which we had amassed; and they wept as they gave me the farewell embrace. I set out alone towards the Pyrenees, intending to follow you to England. But I had not journeyed many miles, when I was seized with a sudden illness, brought on by the anguish I had suffered on account of your flight. It struck me like a thunderbolt, I fell from my horse, and lay senseless in the depth of a ravine. There I might have perished, had it not been for the kindness of some peasants who chanced to pass that way. They took me to their cottage in the neighbouring hamlet; and there I lay, raving in the delirium of fever for many weeks. When I regained complete consciousness, I was so enfeebled—so attenuated, that I could not leave my couch: and thus some more weeks passed, while I lay stretched prostrate and powerless there. One morning a party of soldiers entered the village; and their commanding officer billetted them upon the inhabitants. This officer was the Captain-General's son, whom I had taken prisoner, and whom you saw at the tower. On going his rounds to see that his men were properly cared for, he came to the cottage where I lay. I was recognised: the three months of safety guaranteed by his father, had more than elapsed—and I was accordingly arrested as a Carlist traitor and as a guerilla bandit. But the young man possessed certain generous feelings; and he did not send me out to be shot like a dog, as he might have done, and as most other of the Christino officers would have done in his place. He forwarded me as a prisoner to Barcelona,—at the same time despatching a letter to his father, the Captain-General, beseeching that my life might be spared. This entreaty was not without its effect: but I was sent along with several other Carlist captives to the prison of Cadiz—there to remain until a ship should be in readiness to bear us as felon-exiles to the Phillipine Islands. But it happened that the Governor of Cadiz was a relation of mine: he took compassion on me—and though I myself would ask no favour from the government of Queen Christina's Regency, he adopted measures secretly to procure a mitigation of my sentence. He succeeded—and I was ordered to be retained a prisoner at Cadiz. The same favour was shown to other officers of the Carlist army, who were my fellow-captives. We were treated with much indulgence; and being allowed books, I obtained the means of acquiring the English language. Amongst my fellow-prisoners was an English officer who had served in the Carlist army; and after a while he became my tutor in the study of your native tongue. For, Oh! I was not without the hope of sooner or later recovering my liberty; and I thought—heaven grant that the idea was not vain!—I thought, Elizabeth, that if I could address to you the language of love in those tones and words most familiar to your ear, an impression would be more easily made upon your heart. Am I doomed to be mistaken?"

"Proceed with your narrative, Don Diego," said Elizabeth, in a tone which was slightly tremulous. "Remember that the minutes are speeding by."

"Ah! cruel to remind me that you have limited our present interview to so short a space!" exclaimed Count Christoval,—"I who for years have sustained life by dwelling upon your image! But I will continue. Three years elapsed—and I continued a prisoner at Cadiz. My assiduities in acquiring the English language were unremitting; I had an able tutor—and you may judge whether I made the most of my time, and whether I profited by his lessons. In the summer of 1843 all Spain was convulsed by the civil war raised by Queen Christina's adherents against the Regent Espartero; and in a battle which took place, an uncle of mine—a devoted adherent of Christina—was slain. He died, leaving behind him immense wealth, to which I should have been the legitimate heir, were it not that all I possessed devolved to the Crown, as I was a condemned traitor and an outlaw. Then was it that the kind feeling of the Governor of Cadiz again made itself apparent; and when Spain once more became com-

paratively tranquillized, he exerted all possible interest on my behalf. But matters of this kind drag themselves slowly along in my native country; and it was only a few weeks back that one morning my generous and well-meaning relative brought me the announcement that I had received a full pardon—that my title of Count was restored to me—and that I was allowed to take possession of the large fortune whereof I have spoken. I myself would have asked no favour of those in power: but I was not insane enough to reject the boons which had thus been secretly procured for me. Besides, during my long imprisonment at Cadiz, I had learnt sufficient of the true character of Don Carlos—I had heard so much from my fellow-captives respecting his bigotry, his selfishness, and his narrow-mindedness—that I came to loathe the cause which I had formerly served. But while having been brought to this abhorrence of Carlism, I was not changed into an admirer of the Queen's monarchy. My studies had converted me into a Republican; and on the day that I issued from the prison at Cadiz, I vowed that never again would I draw my sword on behalf of Royalty—but only to aid in emancipating the Spanish people from the thraldom of tyrants, should the opportunity for such redemption ever present itself. Business-affairs, connected with my newly inherited fortune, compelled me to visit Madrid: but no sooner were those matters settled, when I set out on my journey to England. I travelled alone, without ceremony, without attendants: my purpose was to proceed as rapidly as possible, avoiding encumbrances of all kinds. A post-chaise bore me to the Pyrenees. Oh! with what mingled feelings of hope and fear did I enter upon this journey. The mountainous boundary being crossed, I hurried on through France. The nearer I approached to England, the more torturing became my suspense. Sometimes I was buoyed up with enthusiastic hopes: at others I was a prey to the most torturing apprehensions. But all these had I likewise experienced during my captivity at Cadiz. Now, however, as I approached England the dark side of my thoughts grew darker. You might be no more—you might have gone to some far distant clime, without leaving a trace to guide me in the search: or even if you were in your own native land, it might still be impossible to discover you. I reached Dover; and accident led me to take up my temporary quarters at an hotel where you were known. The moment my name was perceived upon the card fastened to my trunk, I became the object of interest with the persons of that establishment. Miss Marshall sought an opportunity of dropping a hint that she knew me—at least by name. Some conversation took place; and you may conceive how great was the tide of enthusiastic joy which was poured into my soul, when I learnt many particulars concerning you. Yes: I learnt that you were alive and well—that you were in reality unmarried—that your heart remained unsusceptible of that passion which was consuming me—and that you had very recently experienced a change in your circumstances of a fortunate description. Miss Marshall spoke of you in the kindest and most friendly terms: she spoke of you indeed with the tender interest of a sister: and I firmly believe, Elizabeth——yes, I am convinced of it—she looked not unfavourably upon me when I confessed to her the object of my visit to England—that I came as a suitor for your hand! That she deemed me thus worthy of espousing her dearest friend—for such you are in her estimation—her conduct towards me showed. She gave me certain information how to discover your residence on my arrival in London—or at least she told me as much as she herself knew at the time upon the subject. I have been to the house which you have recently left—a picturesque little dwelling not far from hence. There I found a female who had been your servant; and she directed me hither. Now, Elizabeth, you know all. My narrative is ended—and my fate is in your hands. You have a word to speak—a word which will either fill me with happiness, or condemn me to despair. I pray you that it may not be spoken inconsiderately or rashly. I come to lay my title and my fortune at your feet. I can give you rank and riches: but what is ten thousand times more valuable—I can give you a heart which never loved before it first became impressed with your image, and can never love another! Now, Elizabeth, solemnly do I conjure you to reflect that the life of a fellow-creature is in your hands!"

"My lord," answered the lady, in a low, soft voice,—and in a voice that was tremulous too,—"if I were to tell you that I am insensible to all these proofs of so much love on your part, I should be something less or something more than woman. I pretend to be neither: and certainly I am not without a feeling of gratitude for this attachment which you have maintained towards me. But would you have me wed where my heart is not won? Count Christoval, I again repeat that this heart of mine cherishes a friendship for you, but knows not the feeling of love——or at least not *now*!"

"What is your decision, Elizabeth?" he asked. "You have not pronounced it. Assuredly you have given me no hope: but you have not consigned me to despair. Perhaps," he added, with a look of mingled bitterness and apprehension, "you regard me as a bandit—and you shrink at the idea of joining your hand to mine?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Miss Paton, a convulsing tremor passing vividly through her entire form: for she felt visibly and keenly at the moment that upon this ground they were at least on an equal footing. "You wrong me——or rather, you do not understand me——no, you cannot! There—take my hand in friendship! It is a proof that I do not shrink from you—that I have no right to do so; but it is not given in love—because I will neither deceive myself nor you by simulating a sentiment which I do not truly and faithfully experience."

There was something wild and full of impetuous emotions in her voice and manner—something strange and impassioned in her whole aspect—as she thus proffered her hand to the Spanish nobleman. He pressed it to his lips:—again and again he covered it with kisses; and it was not withdrawn, because Elizabeth had fallen into a mood of deep abstraction, and knew not rightly that this fair hand of her's was so completely abandoned to him. But suddenly feeling the fervid warmth of those kisses, she withdrew it with an abruptness that both startled and hurt Count Christoval. Yes: his feelings were hurt—his heart was wounded—and he gazed upon her in mingled surprise and reproachfulness. He gazed thus in surprise, because those vehement

emotions which she had displayed, and that sudden singularity of manner, were uppermost in his mind; and he saw that there was something which had thus profoundly agitated her—but which he could not fathom.

"You must leave me now," she said, recovering her wonted composure—or at least a sufficient command over her feelings to appear outwardly composed. "Our interview has already been too long. We must meet again——once again—but only to part for ever," she added tremulously. "I will then endeavour to reason with you against this wild and insensate passion which you have cherished for me——"

"No, no—speak not thus, Elizabeth!" ejaculated Don Christoval. "You have promised me another interview—and in that promise there is hope. I will not insist upon your answer now——I will leave you——Yes I will leave you, in the joyous conviction that I have made some little impression upon your heart——"

"My lord, go not away with that idea!" said Elizabeth, more hurriedly than earnestly: "because—because——"

"Address me not with that cold formality of *my lord*," he exclaimed. "To you I would be Diego—only Diego; and that I shall be so, I now entertain the enthusiastic hope. Oh! it was impossible that such a love as mine could be doomed to disappointment and despair! We will part now, Elizabeth. Tell me when and where we are to meet again. And let it be soon—I conjure you to let it be soon!—for I shall count the hours and the minutes that must elapse until we meet."

"Give me your address, and I will write to you," she replied, after a few moments' consideration, and still there was a tremulousness in her fluid voice.

Count Christoval named an hotel at the West-End of the town; and repeated his fervidly-expressed prayer that the interval ere they met again should not be a long one.

"I will write to you," she said, "as soon as——as soon as——" and still she hesitated—"as soon as I have reflected on all you have told me, Diego ——my lord, I mean."

"Then farewell for the present," he exclaimed: and seizing her hand, he once more carried it to his lips.

She did not withdraw it—how could she remain altogether insensible to the manifold proofs of love which his narrative had afforded, and his conduct during this interview corroborated? No: and thus she suffered him once more to retain possession of that hand for nearly a minute.

"Farewell, dearest Elizabeth—farewell for the present!" he repeated: and then hurrying away was soon out of sight.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

ELIZABETH'S REFLECTIONS.

It was seven o'clock in the morning—and Elizabeth Paton was half-reclining in a large arm-chair, in her elegantly furnished chamber at Stamford Manor. She had not as yet commenced her toilet. The luxuriant masses of her long dark hair hung negligently down upon her bare shoulders—those shoulders which were of such polished whiteness, and so symmetrically modelled. She was absorbed in the deepest thought. A book, which she had taken from the table near, was held unregarded in the fair hand on which Count Christoval's lips had been so fervidly pressed on the preceding evening. Her whole attitude—her look—and the complete abandonment of her form to the influence of that reverie, showed a profound and serious communing with her own heart.

Elizabeth Paton was at that moment a splendid model for the study of a painter or a sculptor. That form, if transferred to the canvass in its semi-nudity and with its superb contours, would have seemed to breathe with a real life, notwithstanding the profound pensiveness which the entire figure denoted. If copied in marble, it would have appeared to glow with vital warmth, notwithstanding that the statue would be as motionless as its living original at that moment. Ah! and the poet, too, might have imbibed inspirations from the contemplation of that superb creature, in the bloom of her womanhood, but every lineament of whose countenance and every contour of whose shape retained the virginal freshness of youth. There was a softness now in the eyes that had lately been wont to look penetratingly, almost with a bold hardihood: there was a softness, too, in the expression of that countenance which had previously borrowed somewhat of a masculine aspect from the daring pursuits in which its possessor had engaged. But even had she worn her male apparel at this moment, it were without effect: it would have been lost sight of in that melting softness of the looks—in that deep pensiveness which the whole form betrayed. Yes: her face, inclined downward, and with the eyes fixed upon vacancy—that attitude of complete self-abondonment—her mien and bearing—all were purely feminine now. Her lips were slightly apart: the polished ivory teeth were visible between their coral lines; and that mouth in its ripe redness, with a dewy moisture upon it, appeared not coarse, but borrowed a delicacy from the general expression of the countenance.

Could she regard with indifference the deep and impassioned idolatry of that handsome Spaniard of whom she was now thinking? Could she fail to be moved by the earnest entreaties and the tender prayers which app ared to be still murmuring in her ears, in a voice naturally melodious, but rendered doubly so when breathing the language of love? And as she reviewed her past insensibility to that passion—and in this retrospection associated the image of Count Christoval with her thoughts—could she not arrive at the comprehension of a by-gone apathy and a present change? When she was his prisoner,—although experiencing towards him a grateful sense of certain kindnesses, there was nevertheless the true spirit of a woman to shield her against the influence of love—that spirit which, smarting under a sense of wrong, blended with her natural pri e, and made her feel that it was not as a prisoner she was to be wooed and won. So much for the indifference of the past. But what of the present? In the natural generosity of her soul she had put from her thoughts all sense of by-gone wrong, when she found Don Diego standing in her presence on the preceding evening. By so doing, she had removed, of her own accord—and yet at

the time unconsciously—the main barrier which had rendered her heart inaccessible to the influence of his adoring affection. Thus they had met in England on far different terms and under very different circumstances from those in which they stood when so many months together in Spain. Had those months been prolonged to years, and had those circumstances continued the same—*she* a captive, and *he* the gaoler—her heart never would have become accessible to the slightest impression which Christoval's assiduities sought to make upon it. But now that they had met on other terms,—*she* in freedom, *he* no longer appearing in the invidious light of a captor—*she* independent to become the arbitress of his fate, *he* confessing that this destiny of his was in her hands,—that impression had been made in an hour which whole months under other circumstances had failed to accomplish. The beauteous bird, imprisoned in a cage, may often be vainly wooed, and coaxed, and encouraged to sing; and thus many weeks and months, and long, long periods pass in the utter silence of its melody: but when freed from its captivity, it will in a moment pour forth the blithe carol of its gushing music—nor in anger for the past, refuse to warble it in the ears of him who had been its gaoler. Like the bird of our metaphor, is often the heart of woman.

And so it was with Elizabeth Paton. On the preceding evening she had persevered in the assurance that she experienced towards Count Christoval naught but friendship, and could feel no love: and she truly thought so when she thus spoke. But each time the assurance was repeated, it was in a less firm voice, and with a gradually growing tremulousness of the accents. The hand, too, which she abandoned to him more than once, was snatched away because she recoiled from the bare idea of manifesting an undue weakness: and yet the fervour of the kisses imprinted thereon, had not failed to touch an electric chord vibrating to the centre of her heart. Moreover, the strong mind of Elizabeth Paton had been destined to enter upon a phase of wild romance: it was not merely entering upon that phase now—it was in the midst of it. Had not Christoval reminded her that *he* had been a bandit? and did not his words suddenly excite the painful—aye, the poignant reminiscence, that *she* had pursued a similar career? What therefore was it now that was engaging her thoughts? what was the strange and fanciful phase of weird-like romance through which her mind was passing? The similarity between that episode in *his* life and that episode in *her* life, appeared to indicate that they were destined for each other—inasmuch as this parity of conditions had seemed to exist for the purpose of abrogating the possibility of reproach from one to the other. Pursuing the train of her reflections, Elizabeth Paton thought to herself that if from the first moment she met Count Christoval in Spain, it was written in the book of destiny that she should become his wife, certain circumstances were requisite to work out that decree. Amongst those circumstances was the imperious necessity which had driven *her* to adopt in England a bandit career, similar to that which *he* had pursued in Spain. By these means was it brought about that they stood upon the same level. *He* had been a bandit, and yet had preserved unimpaired many of the finest, the most chivalrous, and the most magnanimous attributes of man: *she* also had been a bandit, and had preserved the most estimable jewel with which woman is endowed. All these considerations appeared to assimilate their conditions to an extraordinary degree—to fit them for each other—to establish something like a peculiar aptitude in their union in short, to point *him* out as the only man to whom *she* could dare reveal the secret of her career and then accompany him to the altar—and to point *her* out to him as the only woman whom *he* might take as a wife without the fear of always blushing as he met her regards.

From all that we have been saying, the reader may perceive that Elizabeth Paton was rapidly succumbing beneath the influence of that wild worship and ineffable idolatry of which she was the object: she was yielding to that love so impetuous yet so tender—so fervid and yet so delicate, which the Spaniard experienced for her. No wonder that there was this softness in her looks: no wonder that all her traits should once more become unexceptionably feminine. The influence of love was melting whatsoever of masculine hardihood or artificial boldness wherewith her former pursuits and habits had temporarily endowed her. She was becoming a woman—all a woman—once again!

But had she endeavoured to escape from such thoughts as these, that on leaving her couch she had taken up a book and thrown herself in that armchair to read it while waiting the entrance of her maid? Yes: she *had* attempted to divert her mind from dwelling on these new ideas which were rising up within her—stealing into her brain, and gradually diffusing their influence throughout her entire being. On retiring to rest after her interview with Don Diego Christoval, she had been unable to sleep—at least for some hours: she had remained awake, pondering on all that had passed—endeavouring to persuade herself that her heart was not touched—that she was still inaccessible to love. When sleep had at length visited her eyes, the image of the handsome Spaniard appeared to her in her dreams; and these were of a roseate hue. When she awoke again, the bright sun of a cloudless August morning was shining in at the window: she had risen from the couch to avoid the influence of the thoughts of the over-night, and which had been continued in her dreams: she had thrown herself into that armchair—she had taken the book—she had endeavoured to fix her attention upon its pages—but all in vain! Her eyes—those superb dark eyes—were soon gazing upon vacancy: all the powers of her vision were concentrating themselves inward, to dwell with a more earnest look upon the image of Count Christoval: her right arm drooped gradually and languidly—and though her hand still retained the volume, yet it was but mechanically—herself being unconscious that she still held it. And then had ensued that long train of reflections which we have described.

Yes: the reverie was a long one; and at its conclusion, Elizabeth had reached the conviction that Diego and herself were destined for each other, and that she must learn to love him as he already loved her. Ah! when once the meditations of a woman have reached such a point as this, it ceases to be an endeavour to love: it becomes a facility—a necessity—an easy and natural gliding into the experience of the fullness of the heart's passion.

Elizabeth Paton awoke from her reverie: she was startled up by a new thought which had suddenly flashed in unto her mind. Was it that she dreaded to reveal to Count Christoval the one passage in her own life's history which assimilated her condition unto his? No: for this she would reveal to him unreservedly and frankly——aye, and even if necessary, with an eagerness which should prove to him that he need never blush in her presence when retrospecting over the incidents of his own career. What then was it which startled her thus? It was the recollection that she had been married to Villebelle. True, she had surrendered up the documents which she had held in proof of this marriage: but was there not the record thereof in the register at the British Embassy at Paris? True likewise, that the Marquis of Villebelle had married another: but was it not this latter marriage which was void? and was not the former one valid according to the laws of man? And then, too, her father, the Marquis of Eagledean—would he for a moment consent that she should contract another marriage, even though he might approve of the Spanish nobleman as a suitor and forget the worst portion of his antecedents? These reflections were gloomy enough. But suddenly the light of hope flashed in upon them. Had not her father enjoined that she should resume her maiden name of Elizabeth Paton? and in issuing this command, was it not virtually and effectually ignoring that former marriage? Was it not blotting out as much as possible the memory of that mock-ceremony? Yes: it must be conjectured—it must likewise be hoped—that such was the idea which the Marquis of Eagledean had entertained when bidding his newly found daughter resume her maiden name.

Did Elizabeth upon this occasion resolve to fulfil her promise speedily, and write to Count Christoval? No: she determined to wait a few days—to examine still more minutely and deliberately into the condition of her heart. But this was not so easy as she at first fancied. She composed her looks in such a manner that when Alice, her maid, entered the chamber to assist at the morning toilet, she saw not that there was anything peculiar on the part of her mistress; and throughout that day, too, did Elizabeth Paton so bear herself that neither her brother nor Adolphus observed aught unusual or different in her demeanour. The next day it was the same. But all this while there was a rapidly increasing love springing up in the soul of Elizabeth Paton. The spirit had gone forth over the hidden waters of her heart: they had sparkled and bubbled up quickly—the springs of the fountain were opened—and each fresh thought that they engendered gave a new impulse to their flow. Had she been ten years younger, she would have taken as many days—perhaps as many weeks—to comprehend what love was, as now it required hours to endow her with its fullest experience. And thus, during these two days, she felt a growing inclination to accord the handsome Spaniard the promised interview. The third day passed—and the struggle to restrain herself from penning the lines which should bring that interval about, was maintained with a greater difficulty. On the fourth morning she asked herself wherefore she should delay it any longer? and what reason there was why she should not come to a speedy explanation concerning herself with Don Diego, in order that she might be in a position to deliberate for the future? And now arose in her mind the transient fear that Christoval might recoil from her when he learnt that episode in her life which had struck her as so peculiarly assimilating their positions. But no: this apprehension was evanescent indeed—for she knew that the Count's love was potent beyond the exercise of any volition on his part—amounting to an idolatry over the romantic infatuation of which he held not the slightest control!

On this fourth morning, then, she penned a brief note to Don Diego Christoval—to the effect that she would meet him at seven o'clock in the evening at a particular spot, which she described, and which he could not fail to comprehend, as he must have passed that way both coming and returning on the evening of their first interview. Throughout that day Elizabeth preserved the same external calmness as hitherto. She had no fear of being prevented from keeping the appointment by any proposal on the part of Frank or Adolphus to accompany her on an evening walk. For we must here observe that both she and Frank were giving Adolphus lessons on such branches of education as he had experienced no opportunity of pursuing since he was twelve years old, on account of his long captivity from that date of his life, at Beech-Tree Lodge. It was immediately after breakfast that Elizabeth took her turn to instruct him; and in the evening, after dinner, Frank became the friendly tutor. Thus was it that Elizabeth felt assured of being enabled to go forth alone and meet Don Diego Christoval. But did she not reflect that perhaps she was acting in a way of which her father would disapprove? This idea had not escaped her consideration: but she had resolved that the interview about to take place should be the last until the return of the Marquis of Eagledean. Indeed, she sought this interview for the purpose of assuring herself that Christoval would still continue in the same mind towards her after he had learnt the *one* evil episode in her life. It was necessary she should arrive at a certainty on this subject before she made any communication to the Marquis in respect to the appearance of the Spanaird feelings in the neighbourhood, and her own altered towards him.

The spot which she had appointed for the interview, was about half-a-mile from the mansion, and in a somewhat secluded lane. Thither she proceeded at the hour specified: and now her beating heart, her throbbing temples, and the flushing which she felt upon her cheeks, afforded additional evidences to those she had previously acquired that her feelings had indeed undergone an immense change in respect to Count Christoval.

The moment she appeared in the lane, she beheld him hastening—almost flying, towards her. He approached with anxious looks of suspense, seeking to read upon her countenance the *fiat* of his destiny. Oh! love has a wondrous prescience—a marvellous power of penetration!—an electric spark seems to fly from heart to heart, revealing in a moment as much as it would take minutes or hours for words to make known. Between two hearts that love, and though communicating thus by that mutual and mystic intuition, there is as rapid an exchange of thought as between the two extremities of the electric telegraph—thus outstripping by an almost

inexplicable agency all other means of reciprocal correspondence.

"Heaven be thanked—I am happy, I am happy!" ejaculated the impassioned Christoval, the moment he was near enough to catch in warm transfusion the first glance of Elizabeth's eyes; and with all the fervid rapture of his enthusiastic nature, he seized her in his arms—he strained her to his wildly throbbing breast.

Nor did she immediately disengage herself from that embrace. She allowed her form to remain enfolded by those arms thus fervidly flung around her: she received upon her lips the impassioned caresses of love: she caught the electric fire—and she gave those kisses back again. But this scene of tenderness—profound, glowing, ineffably delicious—lasted but a few moments; and then, gently withdrawing herself from the embrace of the enraptured Spaniard, Elizabeth said in earnest tones, "Yes, I love thee—I love thee!"

Don Diego Christoval gave no immediate reply—no words escaped his lips—the power of utterance was suspended: but his looks far more eloquently testified to the fervid rapturous joy that filled his heart. Never had he experienced such emotions: he seemed to be in the midst of paradise, but overcome by the intoxicating influence of its fragrance and its beauties. His brain swam round: the delirium was wild and whirling—but delicious beyond all power of description. Elizabeth comprehended the ecstacy which her adorer's heart experienced; and it was an augmentation of her own happiness to feel that she had been the source of such ineffable delight.

"Is it possible—is it indeed possible?" said the Spaniard, his feelings at length breaking the seal which an overpowering bliss had placed upon his lips; "is it a reality? or is it a dream? Oh, it is a joyous reality—it is an ecstatic truth; and at this moment the world contains not a being happier than I. Captivity is now recompensed: anxiety, care, suspense, and suffering—all are amply rewarded! Dearest, dearest Elizabeth—it is the devotion of all the rest of my life that you have this day ensured unto yourself!"

"My dear Diego," she said, "tranquillize your emotions—let us speak deliberately—for I have much to tell you. Give me your arm, and we will walk here awhile together. I am about to deal frankly and candidly with you: I am about to unfold some circumstances of my life upon which I can only look back with sorrow and regret. But at once understand me——"

"I do already understand you, dearest Elizabeth," he interjected: "for your friend Miss Marshall spoke enthusiastically of the stainless purity of your character as a woman."

"And did she tell you no more?" asked Elizabeth, in a tremulous voice.

"She told me that although you had for some years passed by the name of Mrs. Chandos, yet you might confidently and truly proclaim yourself to be unmarried. Ah! your friend, Miss Marshall, took compassion on my suspense—she sympathized with me in my anxiety to learn all those particulars concerning you, so deeply, deeply interesting to myself!"

"But there is now a revelation," interrupted Elizabeth, "which it behoves me to make without delay. Diego," she continued, looking him full in the face, and yet with a deep blush upon her cheeks and the glitter of uneasiness in her eyes, "what would you think of me if I were to confess that what you have been in Catalonia, have I been in England?"

"Oh! no more of this, my worshipped and adored Elizabeth!" ejaculated the Count in fervid accents. "Had I even found you a lost woman—the most depraved of your sex,—had I discovered you plunged deep down into the slough of shame and self-abandonment,—had I been compelled to seek the vilest den of pollution itself in order to drag you thence,—I should not have continued the less your devoted lover, your constant worshipper! But, as a woman, you are all that a lover can admire or a husband hope to find; and whatsoever misdeeds of another character you may have been driven or led to commit, weigh as naught with me. You love me, Elizabeth—you have given me your heart—you will become my wife—and my happiness is incapable of diminution!"

"Thanks—a thousand thanks, dearest Diego," murmured Elizabeth, "for this assurance:"—and throwing her arms about his neck, she embraced him tenderly of her own accord.

They walked together for half-an-hour, during which Elizabeth represented to the Count that she was under such immense obligations to her benefactor Mr. Gunthorpe, that she dared take no farther step in respect to her love for Christoval until that gentleman returned from Wales. She thought it better at present not to reveal the secret of Mr. Gunthorpe's high rank, and of the close affinity which subsisted between him and her: for the Marquis had enjoined the strictest secrecy on that subject, and his daughter would not violate it, even to that man from whom, if she were the complete mistress of her actions, she would have withheld not a single incident or thought.

"Mr. Gunthorpe's absence," she proceeded to observe, "will not be very long—because I know that he has a particular appointment to keep in London with a young friend of his, a certain Mr. Deveril, for the 20th or 21st of this month. But if, by any accident his absence should be prolonged even until then, I will write to him—I will tell him everything—how you have sought me in England—how my heart has been so suddenly filled with a devoted love towards you; and I will beseech him to give his permission that you may visit at the mansion. But in the interval we must see each other no more."

"No more? and for many days!" said Count Christoval in melancholy accents. "Do not be thus cruel, my beloved one, after having infused so much happiness into my heart!"

"It must be as I have said, Diego," she replied, earnestly and entreatingly. "You would not injure me with my benefactor—you would not encourage me to disobedience? No: it is an additional proof of your love which I now demand. Rest assured that the strength of mine will not be impaired by this temporary separation. Will you not agree to my proposal?"—and as she thus spoke, Elizabeth pressed his hand, gazing at the same time beseechingly and tenderly upon him.

"I will do all that you require," he answered, giving back that look of fondness. "But our separ-

ation must not last for many days: it would become insupportable for me! You promise, dear Elizabeth, that I shall not be doomed to a long absence from you?"

"Judge my feelings by your own," she replied. "And now, dearest Diego, we must separate."

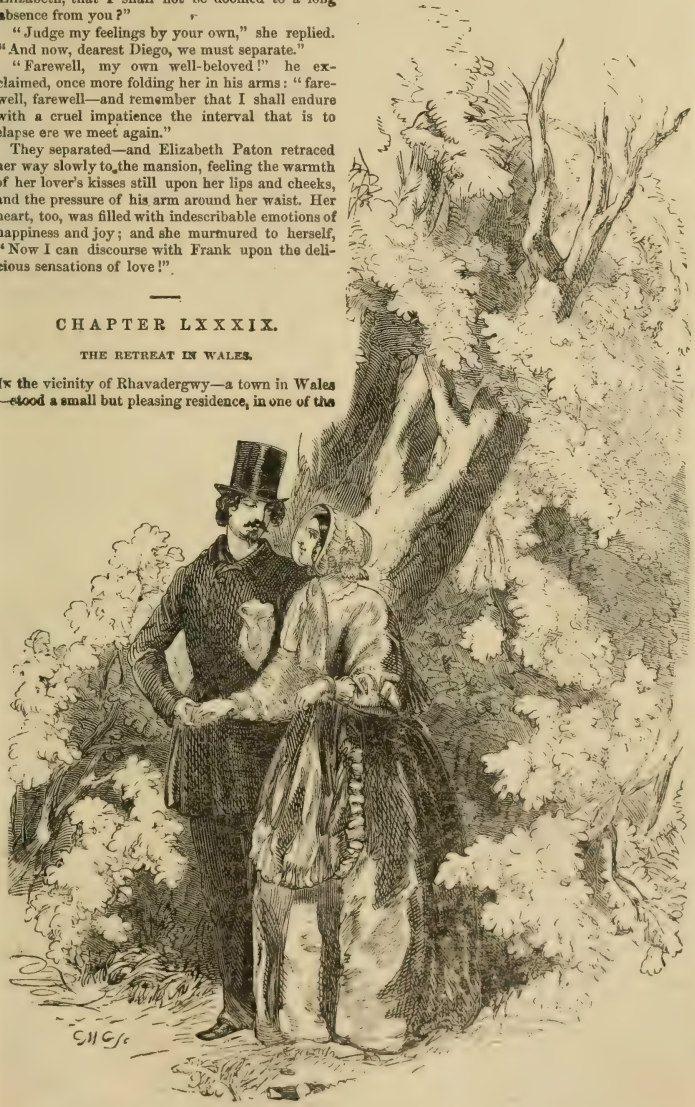
"Farewell, my own well-beloved!" he exclaimed, once more folding her in his arms: "farewell, farewell—and remember that I shall endure with a cruel impatience the interval that is to elapse ere we meet again."

They separated—and Elizabeth Paton retraced her way slowly to the mansion, feeling the warmth of her lover's kisses still upon her lips and cheeks, and the pressure of his arm around her waist. Her heart, too, was filled with indescribable emotions of happiness and joy; and she murmured to herself, "Now I can discourse with Frank upon the delicious sensations of love!"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

THE RETREAT IN WALES.

In the vicinity of Rhavadergwy—a town in Wales—stood a small but pleasing residence, in one of the



most picturesque parts of Radnorshire. The site of his habitation was upon an eminence: and a beautiful garden sloped gently down to a purling rivulet which formed its boundary. In the rear of the house there was a paddock, in which the deer disported gaily, and where the swans floated upon a large piece of artificial water.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that the Marquis of Eagledean, having walked forth from Rhavadergwy, where he arrived on the previous evening, approached this dwelling of which we have just spoken. His countenance expressed a mingled anxiety and seriousness. More than sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen Lady Everton; and he was now about to present himself before her. He had learnt in the town that she lived in an almost total seclusion—that she was exceedingly charitable and devout—but that it was generally reported and believed in the neighbourhood that her reason was affected. The Marquis had not chosen to appear too minute in his inquiries; and therefore beyond these few particulars he had learnt little or nothing.

On reaching the vicinage of the habitation, he stopped short at a distance of about fifty yards, and gazed upon it with the feeling we have above described,—a feeling of mingled seriousness and anxiety. Yes: upwards of sixteen years had elapsed since he had seen her—and she was then thirty years of age. She must therefore be now forty-six. Must not an immense change have been accomplished during this interval in her personal appearance?—a change too all the more remarkable and all the greater, because it was not the lapse of years alone that would have effected it—care and sorrow would have combined to accomplish the work. There was something profoundly sad—something indeed solemnly awful in the thought, that perhaps in a few minutes he would at a single glance be enabled to observe the full extent of that change, and to perceive how powerful had been the ravages of time and the desolating influences of affliction. And then—as he stood thus meditating—back to the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean came the image of Alexandrina as she was when he had last seen her. *Then* she was in all the glorious beauty of womanhood,—perfectly resembling that portrait which he had so recently seen in his daughter Elizabeth's possession, and which was engraved from an original painted in 1828, when she was in her thirtieth year. *Then* her countenance was of a perfectly oval-shape, with a forehead of noble height—a forehead, too, fair and pure as the chastest marble of Paros: and the splendid face was wont to be framed with a perfect cloud of raven tresses showering upon her superb shoulders and upon her back. *Then* the darkly pencilled brows threw out in lovelier contrast the purity of those temples on the opals of which they were set; and the long ebon fringes of the eyes mitigated without subduing the lustre of the magnificent orbs themselves. *Then*, too, the lips from which his own had so often culled ecstatic but guilty kisses, were full and of the richest redness; and the low-bodied dress, which she was wont to wear in compliance with the fashion of the age, afforded a glimpse of the well-proportioned bust. Such was the bright and beautiful image which was conjured up to the memory of the Marquis of Eagledean—the image of her who had possessed his first and only love—the love of an entire life! And as he reflected upon this image, and thought how time and affliction might have marred those lovely lineaments, rendering their possessor prematurely old,—the tears trickled down the nobleman's cheeks; and he wept—Oh! he wept as convulsively as a child!

And was not *he* too changed? Would even the penetrating eyes of love,—if love she still cherished towards him—be enabled to discern in his altered person one single lineament to remind her of the handsome and courtly individual who had been the object of her worship in by-gone years? The Marquis indeed felt that the meeting which was about to take place, would be under very painful circumstances.

Wiping away the tears from his cheeks, and subduing his emotions as well as he was able, Lord Eagledean advanced a little nearer to the dwelling and reached a hedge-row that bordered the garden on the side skirting the road along which he was walking. In a few moments he beheld a lady descending the steps of the front-door. She came forth slowly—looking neither to the right nor to the left—but with her eyes bent downward, as if in deepest thought. She was dressed in black; and a sable veil was thrown over her head—but not so as to conceal her features. From the point where the Marquis suddenly halted on perceiving her, he could not obtain even the slightest glimpse of that countenance; and yet he felt convinced that this was the Alexandrina of his enduring and faithful love! Yes—the figure was exactly of her stature: it was not bowed by years—it was still upright as in her youthful days he had known it to be. But it was from an intuitive presentiment rather than from actual observation, that he experienced the conviction that this was she whom he sought.

He remained where he was concealed behind the hedge, hoping that she would approach near enough on the other side for him to observe her attentively and well, so that whatever shock might be destined for him from her altered appearance should have passed away ere he revealed himself to her. Descending the steps, she traversed a large grass plat in front of the mansion—and then slowly entered the gravel-walk which ran behind the hedge. Her steps were deliberate: she advanced like one who was all the time absorbed in profound thought, and who took no notice of the trees, the flowers, and the natural beauties by which she was surrounded. The sun was powerful—and she drew her veil completely over her countenance: so that as she approached nearer to the spot where Lord Eagledean stood, he could obtain no glimpse of those features on which he yearned to gaze again. But her figure was little impaired by the lapse of time: it was not emaciated—it was not reduced to leanness—on the contrary, it presented all the fine contours of a more youthful period. Could this lady indeed be she whom he had come to visit?

She passed by on the other side of the verdant barrier; and the Marquis strained his eyes to penetrate also through the thick folds of the veil: but the attempt was vain—he could not catch the slightest glimpse of the countenance thus hidden. She proceeded on towards the lower part of the garden; and Lord Eagledean continued his way to the gate which afforded admittance to the grounds.

He opened it—he entered the garden—and then he hesitated whether to go and accost that lady, or whether to advance up to the house at once and make the usual inquiry which a visitor would put. At that moment a domestic, in a plain dark livery, appeared upon the steps: he was an old man, and one who might at once be set down as being a faithful dependant of long standing in his present service. The Marquis accosted him, and said, "I wish to see Lady Everton: is that her ladyship walking yonder in the garden?"

"It is, sir," responded the old servant: "but her ladyship receives no visitors. All matters of business must be conducted through Mrs. Jameson——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Eagledean: for he remembered that this was the friendly housekeeper at Everton Park, who had been admitted into the confidence of her mistress in respect to the birth of the two children. "But I have some very particular intelligence to communicate."

"If so, sir," observed the footman, "there will be no harm in your introducing yourself to her ladyship: she can but refer you, if necessary, to Mrs. Jameson."

The old man spoke courteously—even benevolently; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thus encouraged, was about to hasten away towards the extremity of the garden—when it suddenly occurred to him that if Alexandrina should chance to recognize him at once, a scene might possibly ensue which she would afterwards deeply regret and wish to have been avoided. He accordingly turned back again towards the footman,—saying, "All things considered, it would perhaps be better that I should see Mrs. Jameson first."

The domestic bowed, and led the way through a hall, up a staircase, to a room where an old woman with hair as white as snow was seated, occupied with her knitting. She was dressed in black; and in her look benevolence was mingled with sadness. She was not so much altered but that the Marquis would have recognized her, even if he had not been informed who she was.

"Mrs. Jameson, a gentleman wishes to see you on some business connected with her ladyship;"—and having placed a chair for the accommodation of the Marquis, the old footman withdrew from the apartment.

Lord Eagledean sat down, and did not immediately speak—for he saw that Mrs. Jameson's looks had been at once earnestly fixed upon him. They grew more searching: the expression of her countenance showed that memory was doing its work faithfully, and that he would be recognized by her. Ah! then if *she* were thus enabled to penetrate through the change and alteration which years had effected in him, how much more easily would Lady Everton have done so! and how prudent was the precaution he had thus taken in seeing Mrs. Jameson first!

"My lord, my lord," said the old woman, trembling from head to foot with the violence of her emotions, "I know you—I recognize you! What brings you hither?"

"Need you ask?" inquired the Marquis: "can you not conjecture?"

"But your wife, my lord—the Marchioness of Eagledean," interrupted Mrs. Jameson,—"is she not still alive? is she no more?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the nobleman: for these words struck him as a revelation, instantaneously making known to his comprehension some new phase in the villany of Mr. Everton. "My wife—the Marchioness of Eagledean——I never was married!"

A cry of mingled joy and astonishment burst forth from the aged housekeeper's lips, as she started up from her chair: then fixing her looks earnestly and penetratingly upon the Marquis, she said, "My lord, I adjure you by everything you deem solemn and holy, to proclaim the truth, whatsoever it may be!"

"I have already proclaimed it," he replied, profoundly agitated. "I am incapable of deceit. I never have been married——No: never, never has the image of your mistress been absent from this heart of mine!"

"Oh what misery—what long years of misery, wretchedness, and woe might have been spared to my poor mistress, had she known the truth!"—and as Mrs. Jameson spoke, she resumed her seat, wringing her hands, while tears trickled down the countenance that was furrowed with age.

"The blackest iniquities have been perpetrated," said the Marquis with bitter vehemence: "but until this moment I did not even suspect their fullest extent. And now let me hasten to ask you a question——Does Lady Everton know that her son Adolphus is yet alive?"

Mrs. Jameson gave a wild start—and then sinking back in the chair, gazed in speechless astonishment upon the Marquis of Eagledean. She evidently knew not what to think: and by the expression of her countenance it was apparent that she feared his reason was unsettled.

"No, my good woman—faithful dependant of your mistress that I am sure you have been—I am not deceived—I am not deceiving you! It is another truth that I proclaim—Adolphus lives—and what is more, his rights are acknowledged! Yes—his villanous uncle has abandoned the title and estates which he had usurped!"

"Then, may God be thanked!" said the old woman in a tone of the profoundest piety. "There may yet be happiness in this world for my poor mistress:"—and having thus spoken, she clasped her hands together—raised her venerable countenance—and the prayer of thanksgiving, which she said inwardly, wavered upon her thin lips.

"I see that we have much to talk about—many things to converse upon," resumed the Marquis, after a pause, "ere the intelligence be broken to your mistress that her son is alive and that I am within these walls. In a few words let me likewise explain to you that our two children Elizabeth and Frank are well and happy. They are beneath my roof in the neighbourhood of London——But again you survey me with the deepest amazement?"

"Because, my lord, it has this moment become *your* turn," replied Mrs. Jameson, "to reveal another phase in that scheme of villany which has been practised towards my poor mistress. Four years have elapsed since she was assured in a letter from her brother-in-law, that poor Frank was no more—and that Elizabeth, having inherited *his* fortune according to the terms of your lordship's trust-deed, was dissipating it rapidly, as she had already dis-

sipated her own, amongst the profligate and dissolute."

"All false—abominably, atrociously false!" ejaculated the Marquis, springing up from his chair, and beginning to pace the apartment in a terrible state of excitement and rage. "Oh, the monsters to whom the welfare of these dear children was entrusted!—Oh, that miscreant Everton! Shall they, after all, be suffered to escape condign punishment? or shall not a terrific vengeance alight upon their heads? But no, no: there are a thousand considerations——I must calm myself—I must compose these wildly agitated feelings of mine!"

Thus speaking, Lord Eagledean resumed his seat; and giving his hand to Mrs. Jameson, he said in an altered voice—a voice full of solemn emotion,—"You have been a kind and faithful friend to your mistress: accept my heartfelt gratitude!"

"Oh, my lord," she replied, the tears still streaming down her cheeks, "you know not what happiness you have imparted to my soul! And what happiness, too, is now in store for her ladyship! But let us hasten to discourse on those subjects which require mutual explanation; for I long—Oh, I long to be enabled to go and commence breaking to my dear mistress all the joyous intelligence that I shall have to impart!"

"In respect to my beloved children Elizabeth and Frank," said the Marquis, "I need not tell you that now they are under my care, they are amply and richly provided for: but the fortunes that I settled upon them upwards of sixteen years ago, have been self-appropriated by those villains Petersfield and Marston."

"Heavens, her ladyship's own brother!" ejaculated the housekeeper. "And it is false, then, that Elizabeth has led an evil life—that she ran away from her husband the Marquis of Villebelle, with a paramour——"

"All false—all diabolically false!" exclaimed the Marquis: then, in a graver tone, he added, "It is my firm conviction that no female in the land can boast herself more pure, more chaste, than my daughter Elizabeth. I have not time now to enter into details: suffice it for me to tell you that her marriage with the Marquis of Villebelle was a mockery—a marriage into which she was coerced by the villain Marston—a marriage that was never consummated, and one which would not hold good according to the English law. As for Frank, Lord Petersfield procured him a situation—a menial one, at Court. It was so easy for a peer of the realm thus to dispose of a youth whom he had basely plundered! But little did he imagine that poor Frank's memory would be so good in recognizing those whom he had seen in his earlier years. One day, two ladies whom he had met in the company of his mother at Everton Park, and also at St. James's, appeared at Court together. I know not who they could have been——"

"Lady Hesketh and her beautiful cousin Miss Villiers," remarked Mrs. Jameson. "They must have been the two ladies to whom your lordship alludes. I will tell your lordship presently how they came to be acquainted with Lady Everton's secret."

"Well," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, "as I was saying, Frank recognized that Lady Hesketh whom you have named, and her beautiful cousin Miss Villiers, when they appeared at Court together. But although he thus recognized them, he knew not their names. They, as a matter of prudence, denied that they were acquainted with him—denied indeed that they knew who he was, or had ever seen him before. Doubtless the report of his death had not reached their ears; or else they would have seemed still more surprised. But certain it is that soon afterwards Lord Petersfield thought it better to have Frank removed from a place where he might meet them again; and he accordingly transferred him to the service of Lady Saxondale, at whose mansion he was no doubt well aware that Lady Hesketh and Miss Villiers did not visit."

"Oh, what a ramification of treachery!" cried Mrs. Jameson, holding up her hands in astonishment and dismay. "Years have elapsed since any communication took place between these ladies and my mistress: for when Lady Everton resolved upon retiring to this seclusion in Wales, she broke off all her past friendships—resigned all her previous acquaintances!"

"And therefore," observed the Marquis, "Lord Petersfield entertained little fear that your poor mistress would learn from Lady Hesketh or Miss Villiers that her son Frank was really alive and had been seen in a menial capacity at the Palace. But now, Mrs. Jameson, have the goodness to explain to me those matters concerning which I am yet in the dark,—all that occurred, in short, from the time that I quitted England in the year 1823."

"I will, my lord," responded the old housekeeper: "but it shall be as succinctly as I can—for I am sure that you are impatient to have speech of her ladyship."

"Yes," replied Lord Eagledean: "but ere we meet, I would rather be acquainted with everything—so that she may be spared the pain of having any explanations to give."

"Your lordship can well understand," resumed Mrs. Jameson, "that the knowledge of my poor lady's secret put her completely in the power of that bad man her brother-in-law. He came and gave his orders at the Park just as if he were the master. He represented to my poor mistress that after all he had learnt, she was not a fit and proper person to have full charge of her son Adolphus during the father's absence. He removed Adolphus to the western extremity of the building,—lodging him in apartments to which there was a communication by means of the private staircase. He introduced creatures of his own to surround the boy—to attend upon him—and doubtless to keep watch over him also. As the time approached for my lord's arrival from India, Mr. Everton sent up all the old servants of the Park to the town-house in London, for the purpose, as he said, of making the fullest preparations there to receive his lordship. I was packed off along with the rest; and Everton Park was left in the hands of the strange domestics whom Mr. Everton had planted there. I went away with a heavy heart—for I suspected some mischief: but I was relieved to a certain extent when I found that Mr. Everton himself was about to proceed to London and pass a few days at his own house. I will now describe what took place at the Park after I and my fellow-servants had removed to the town-residence; although I did not learn the full particulars from my mistress's lips

until some time later. It appears that several days elapsed, during which her brother-in-law being absent, she was permitted to enjoy more of the society of Adolphus than she had previously been. But one day she was taken seriously ill. I must tell you that Mr. Everton had located a medical man at the Park, under pretence of watching over the health of Adolphus. My poor lady has often declared to me her conviction that she was taken so seriously ill in consequence of some medicine which that surgeon had persisted in prescribing for herself. Certain it is that she fell into a complete state of stupor—a lethargy which rendered her unconscious of all that was passing around her. In this condition she remained nearly a week; and when she came to herself, it was only to learn the dreadful intelligence that Adolphus had been taken ill on the same day as herself—just one week back—and that he had died during the night. Indeed, the funeral was to take place on that very same day on which my poor mistress recovered her senses. Her anguish was ineffable: it *must* have been so—and in the wildness of her despair, as she afterwards told me, she plainly and openly accused her brother-in-law, who in the meantime had returned to the Park, of making away with his nephew. He rejected the accusation with an indignant burst of passion, which seemed so natural that it made her ladyship regret she should have advanced such a charge. The medical man was there to corroborate Mr. Everton's denial of the wickedness; and for the time being the poor lady's dark suspicions were lulled, or perhaps absorbed in the bitterness of her grief. She had not the satisfaction, as she subsequently observed to me, of contemplating her dear child's remains: for they were already, as was represented to her, locked up in the coffin which was about to be borne away to the tomb. She was however conveyed by her female dependants to the chamber of death: and she wept scalding tears over the coffin. She was borne back to her own room in a state of unconsciousness—fever supervened—and she remained delirious for several days. When convalescent, her brother-in-law remonstrated with her for the infamous charge she had levelled against him; and while again indignantly repudiating it, he bade her observe that it was an ungrateful recompense for his kind forbearance in keeping the secret of her amour with your lordship. My poor lady fancied she beheld a threat in this intimation; and though her suspicions in respect to poor Adolphus's death revived somewhat in her bosom, she felt herself so completely in the power of her brother-in-law that she dared not give utterance to another word."

"The earth contains no miscreant greater than that brother-in-law!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean. "Mrs. Jameson, all those arrangements which he made at the Park, and which you have described,—the surrounding Adolphus with his own creatures — the introduction of a medical man, doubtless well bribed to his interests—the sending away of yourself and the other faithful servants of the household—and the administration of some medicament which paralysed her ladyship for a whole week,—all these things were done to enable him to carry out his diabolical design! For the corpse of a pauper boy was secretly conveyed into the house by night—while Adolphus was borne away to Beech-Tree Lodge,—a place possessed by Mr. Everton in the village of Hornsey, and where poor Adolphus remained sixteen years in captivity!"

Mrs. Jameson was horrified at this statement; and some minutes elapsed ere she could resume her narrative. But at length she continued thus:—

"As soon as my poor mistress was again convalescent, she hastened to London to be at the town-mansion when her husband should arrive from India: and then it was she told me of all that had taken place at the Park. Of course the tidings of Adolphus's death had already reached us in London; and I can assure you that heads were gloomily shaken, suspicious looks exchanged, and dark misgivings murmuringly whispered amongst us all. But what could we say? what could we do?—and I, who was most in her ladyship's secrets, knew how completely she was in the power of her brother-in-law! Well, the General returned from India. Oh! how altered he was. He never was of prepossessing appearance: but he came back looking like a wretched old man—with broken constitution and shattered health, all sacrificed at the shrine of his ambition! It was a hard task for my poor lady to maintain anything like composure when he conversed with her upon her pursuits during the years of his absence. He was much cut up by hearing of the death of his son,—which intelligence, I should observe, had reached him the instant he set foot in England, and therefore previous to his arrival in London. In one sense it was fortunate that her ladyship had an excuse for her affliction and her tears: inasmuch as her grief constituted a mask to veil from her husband's eyes the confusion and the remorse she felt at encountering him again. A few months afterwards he died. There was no foul play in his case: he was hovering on the verge of the tomb when he arrived in England. His brother then assumed the title and took possession of the estates,—her ladyship having only a jointure of three thousand a-year."

"And were you aware," asked Lord Eagledean, "that at the expiration of twelve months from his lordship's death, I wrote from Germany to your poor mistress?"

"Yes, my lord—I am approaching that subject now. Her brother-in-law, who had become Lord Everton, doubtless expected that you would take some such step as that—and of course, from all you have told me, it by no means suited him that you should return to England."

"No—because he might have been well aware that if I became the husband of your mistress, I should institute a strict inquiry into the circumstances of Adolphus's death. And moreover," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, "there can be no doubt that he had already come to an understanding with his sister-in law's brother, Sir John Marston,—that while he was to do what he thought fit to obtain the title and estates of Everton, Marston and Petersfield might on their side look upon the fortunes of Elizabeth and Frank as their own booty. But proceed, Mrs. Jameson."

"Well, my lord, I was going to observe," continued the old housekeeper, "that my lady's brother-in-law was on the look-out either for your return to England, or else for the arrival of letters from you. A letter did come—and he intercepted it. When he had read it, he took it to my mistress,

whom he allowed, or rather compelled to reside at the Park. She was in a bad state of health—deeply desponding—and with a mind painfully attenuated. In such a condition it was not a very difficult task for him to coerce her into a particular course of action: her reputation was in his hands—he could shatter her fair fame at any moment, as if it were brittle glass! He compelled her to write back a particular style of answer to yourself; and he knew from what you had previously written, that it would prove conclusive—for you had left my dear mistress to decide upon your fate. No reply came: or if you ever wrote again, the letters reached not my mistress."

"I never wrote again," observed the Marquis of Eagledean. "I retired to Italy — adopted an assumed name—and dwelt in retirement."

"My lady's brother-in-law," continued the housekeeper, "appeared now to feel more assured of his own position: he no doubt concluded that all apprehensions which had arisen on your account, were fully disposed of. Time wore on—and her ladyship became more her own mistress: she was gradually relieved from the species of restraint which her brother-in-law had put upon her. Sometimes she went to stay with the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace: but generally she dwelt at the Park. She felt dull and lonely; and she invited Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers to stay with her. These two young ladies were cousins—they were orphans too, and totally dependent upon distant relatives, whom they did not love. It was therefore a pleasure to them to experience the friendship of my poor mistress—while on the other hand it was a pleasure to her to have them with her. They became her bosom-friends. It was in the year 1832 that her ladyship inquired of her brother Sir John Marston, whether any tidings had been heard of your lordship. The reply was in the negative: but doubtless Sir John informed Lord Everton——or *Mr. Everton* as he all along ought to have been called——that such an inquiry had been made. That bad man, naturally trembling lest his sister-in-law's affection for your lordship was as strong as ever, and might lead to the revival of a correspondence between you, paid a visit soon afterwards to the Park, and displayed a letter which he purported to have received from some place on the Continent, and which letter contained an account of your lordship's marriage."

"A base fabrication—a vile forgery!" interjected the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Alas! we knew it not at the time: and the intelligence," continued Mrs. Jameson, "struck my poor mistress as with a death-blow. It destroyed a hope—the last hope which she had all along cherished: namely, that you would still return. She became dangerously ill: once more did delirium seize upon her—and one evening in her ravings she betrayed her secret to Miss Dalrymple and Miss Villiers. But they were kind-hearted, generous-minded girls—the elder not more than twenty-one at that time, the other two years younger; and they deeply sympathized with their friend and benefactress. As she got better, she experienced a deep yearning to see her children; and they were accordingly brought by Mrs. Burnaby to the Park. This was with the consent of her brother-in-law—but only on the condition that immediately afterwards Elizabeth should be removed from the care of Mrs. Burnaby and sent to a boarding-school."

"The better," observed the Marquis of Eagledean, "to enable Petersfield and Marston to work out their ulterior designs. But pray proceed."

"My narrative is drawing towards an end," said Mrs. Jameson. "A year afterwards my poor mistress was on a visit to the Princess Sophia at St. James's Palace. Lord Petersfield presided over the Princess's household: and by his permission her ladyship was allowed to see her little Frank again. About ten months after that, Mrs. Burnaby died. Then Lord Petersfield decided upon sending Frank to the same school at Southampton where his sister Elizabeth had already been two years But before he was conducted thither, Lady Everton begged that she might see him. Lord Petersfield declared that it must be for the last time, as the boy was getting too old to permit these occasional interviews to be continued with any safety to her ladyship's secret. His lordship brought Frank to the Park—and then took him to Southampton. Shortly after this incident Miss Dalrymple became the wife of Sir Albert Hesketh; and her cousin Miss Villiers went to reside permanently with her. Lady Everton now resolved to carry into execution a plan which she had some time back conceived: namely, that of retiring from the world. All her hopes of happiness in this life were dead within her; she believed your lordship married to another —she had seen her children, as she thought, for the last time—and for their future welfare she had little apprehension, knowing how bounteously your lordship had provided for them, and never entertaining the most distant apprehension that Lord Petersfield and her brother Sir John Marston could play those children false. When her determination of retiring to some remote seclusion was communicated first of all to Sir John, he exhibited an appearance of the most affectionate zeal in volunteering to find her a suitable dwelling; and her brother-in-law also testified a semblance of the kindest consideration, by offering to purchase and make over to her whatsoever retreat Sir John Marston might decide upon. In the course of a few weeks her ladyship was informed that a sweet little domain in Wales had been found and purchased for her use."

"Yes—those villains," exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, "were all too glad to get her into quarters as remote as possible!"

"It was at the close of the year 1834,—some months after Mrs. Burnaby's death, and after that last interview with little Frank,—that her ladyship came down into Wales. She brought with her six of the oldest and most faithful domestics belonging to her household, in addition to myself. Arrangements were made with her brother-in-law for the payment of her jointure through Messrs. Marlow and Malton, Solicitors of Parliament Street, Westminster."

"And they were doubtless instructed by the brother-in-law," observed the Marquis, "not to give her ladyship's address to anybody."

"My poor mistress herself," continued the housekeeper, "determined, on retiring from the world, to break off all correspondence with her former friends and acquaintances. She wished to separate herself as much as she could from the past, in order that the future years of her life might flow on as tran-

quilly and as uninterruptedly as possible. The only subject on which she sought occasional information from her brother and brother-in-law, was the welfare of her children. Years passed on. In 1839, Elizabeth being then of age, her ladyship received the intelligence that she had married the Marquis of Villebelle; and it was a source of gratification to her to find that *one* wish she had formally expressed was thus fulfilled by the bestowal of a noble name upon her daughter. But some time afterwards she was plunged into affliction by the intelligence that this daughter had separated from her husband and was living irregularly. Then came the news of Frank's death——"

"All done," interjected the Marquis, "for the purpose of stifling her future inquiries relative to her children, by making her believe that one was dead and the other unworthy her consideration. And now tell me, Mrs. Jameson, in what frame of mind her ladyship's existence has been passed."

"With the exception of those two causes for deep affliction—and which, thank heaven, in a few minutes will be dispelled—her ladyship has experienced a degree of mental tranquillity which, if not altogether natural, has at least saved her health and her person likewise from the ravages of a bitter anguish. I do not think, my lord, that the tone of her mind *has been* altogether natural: it may be described as a calmness both death-like and glacial; —it has preserved her from excitement and irritability—but I fear that if Providence had not sent you hither now, with all these happy tidings, she would gradually sink down into idiotic apathy. She seldom speaks; and when she does, it is with a strange coldness, —a coldness that it does one harm to feel the influence of. She seldom reads and never works: but she either sits in the drawing-room gazing from the window—or else wanders in the garden, or about the neighbourhood, in a kind of dull listless mood. Nevertheless, there are moments of activity with her; and these are when dispensing her charities: for her jointure is far more than suffices for the maintenance of the establishment in this part of the country where everything is so cheap; and she expends large sums in doing good. Her benevolence has rendered her an universal favourite as well as an object of great interest; but I believe that most persons in the district fancy the poor lady is not altogether right in her intellects. Alas! they know not her story as you and I know it, my lord——But I think that we have no nee l for farther discourse—and certainly no necessity for dwelling upon mournful topics. Shall I go and prepare her ladyship to see you? shall I break to her the intelligence that her son Adolphus lives—that Frank also lives — and that Elizabeth is worthy of her love?"

"Yes—go—go quickly, my good woman," said the Marquis of Eagledean, all his agitation reviving at the thought that in a few minutes he would again behold the countenance of her whom he had loved for upwards of thirty years.

"I go, my lord," replied Mrs. Jameson, cheerfully. "But one word more. What may I tell her of Adolphus? Consider the questions that a mother is sure to ask——"

"I comprehend you—I understand you full well," exclaimed the Marquis. "Tell her that he is a fine tall handsome young man of whom she will be proud. But more;—there are other tidings with which you may gladden her poor heart! Tell her that her daughter Elizabeth is one of the handsomest women of whom England can boast; and that Frank is a youth of an almost fabulous beauty. Go and tell her all this—and I will await you here."

Mrs. Jameson hurried from the room, her countenance beaming with brighter smiles than it had worn for many and many a long day, to execute the pleasing task which she had in hand.

CHAPTER XC.

THE INTERVIEW.

In consequence of what the worthy old housekeeper had said with regard to Lady Everton's personal appearance, the reader is prepared to learn that it had not undergone such a very great change as under all circumstances might have been expected. We will proceed to state that although her ladyship was now forty-six years of age, she might have easily passed herself off as little more than forty. There was no colour upon her cheeks—but the cheeks themselves were not sunken nor hollow: the lustre of her eyes was subdued—but then, in her earlier years it had been so bright that this mitigation of their brilliancy had only softened and not dimmed them. Her hair, of raven darkness, had so far resisted the ravages of time and the withering influence of sorrow, as to be only touching on the commencement of a change—and this to be detected only by a tire-woman when attending the duties of her ladyship's toilet. Her teeth were remarkably well preserved, and helped to ward off the aspect of advancing years. Her figure, as already stated, had retained its fine proportions; and the uprightness of her gait, together with a certain statuesque carriage of the bust and head, which was natural to her, gave her an air of mingled dignity and grace which contributed to sustain her right to be pronounced a fine handsome woman.

Such was Lady Everton—such the object of the Marquis of Eagledean's visit into Wales—such the appearance which she was anon to present before him. But, Ah! if instead of being destined to meet this still handsome and attractive woman, he had been doomed to find her a withered, emaciated, shrivelled creature—with cavern-like eyes, silvered hair, and toothless mouth,—still, still would he have experienced for her the same love—the same sympathy: because *his* was no sensual passion now —it was a chaste and holy affection, feeding itself upon the memories of the past, and sanctified by the existence of two beings who were the pledges of that love.

We need hardly inform the reader that during Mrs. Jameson's absence from the room where the Marquis remained, he experienced an indescribable agitation—a surging-up of a variety of emotions—at the prospect of so speedily meeting the mother of those children. About half-an-hour elapsed,—an interval that was short enough for worthy Mrs. Jameson to break to her ladyship the varied pieces of agreeable intelligence she had to impart—but an interval full long indeed for Lord Eagledean

himself to endure the excitement of his stirred-up feelings. At length the door opened. Eagerly did he glance towards it: but only the housekeeper appeared. Her countenance was beaming with satisfaction and joy; and the Marquis at least gathered thence the assurance that the glad tidings revealed to Lady Everton, had produced no evil effects. Mrs. Jameson beckoned him to follow; and she led the way towards a drawing-room, at the threshold of which she stopped short for a moment.

"My lord," she said, in a low whispering voice, "I shall go no farther: you will enter there alone."

Thus speaking, she opened the door. Oh! at that instant the Marquis of Eagledean felt himself young again——aye, felt as if twenty years had been struck off the sum of his existence—felt as if a new life were rejuvenescent in his veins! He sprang forward—the door closed behind him—a cry of joy reached his ears—a form flew to meet him, quicker than he himself was advancing; and the beloved one of other times—the beloved one too of the present moment—was clasped in his arms. Years of anguish—years of hopeless sorrow—years of separation were all compensated for in those first few moments of ecstatic joy. It may seem strange to speak thus of that old man of sixty and that woman of forty-six: but their hearts had become young again—their memories travelled backward to the joys and delights of by-gone times. Thus the outpourings of their rapture were as fervid and as enthusiastic as if it were a meeting of two youthful lovers. There was a whole world of bliss concentrated in that first embrace;—and joy has its ardour and its ecstacy, its bliss and its intoxication, for those of advanced years as well as for the young.

A few minutes afterwards we may behold them seated together upon a sofa, their hands locked in a firm clasp—their looks rivetted upon each other. Then the Marquis saw that Mrs. Jameson had spoken truly when she represented how comparatively slight was the alteration which had taken place in the personal appearance of Lady Everton. Gradually a mournful feeling stole into the heart of Lord Eagledean; and as a long-drawn sigh rose up to his lips and half found vent ere he could stifle it, Lady Everton said in a low deep voice, "Paton, there is yet a cloud upon your happiness."

"Do you not find me much changed, Alexandrina—Oh, very much changed?" he asked: "do you not see that I have grown old, while you have escaped the ravages of time?"

"Hush, Paton—speak not thus of yourself to me," said her ladyship, still in a soft voice, and looks of ineffable tenderness. "I behold you now through the medium of a faithful memory; I behold you only in the light of that love which I have ever borne you, and which never has been impaired by circumstance or by time. If you find me less changed than you expected, I rejoice——Oh! I rejoice unfeignedly: for even now it is sweet to hear the language of admiration from your lips."

With these words Lady Everton threw her arms around the neck of the Marquis of Eagledean, and embraced him with as much fervour—with as much fond admiration, as if a long, long interval of years had not changed him nor made him old. The sadness fled away from his countenance—he smiled in happiness again: and sweet indeed were the smiles which played upon the lips of Lady Everton.

"It appears to me all like a dream," she said: "for I could not have hoped that there was any happiness in store for me in this world. And yet, I know not how it was—but still there would sometimes arise in my mind strange and unaccountable thoughts, that something would happen to alter my career upon earth,—some new phase in my destiny which was as yet unaccomplished. But then, so often as I found myself indulging in such fancies as these, I endeavoured to banish them from my mind as visions incapable of realization; and I essayed to settle my thoughts on a complete resignation to my present lot. Then again, I have experienced long, long intervals of a dull, listless, and mournful apathy,—a sort of tomb-like sensation, as if though alive, I was already beneath the numbing influence of death. Ah! *that* was an awful state of feeling: and yet there was a depth of tranquillity in it—an unnatural calm in which my senses were steeped. Had I given way to outbursts of anguish and all the wildness of a terrible excitement, you would not have seen me as you see me now: you would have found me a haggard, wretched, withered thing. But I abandoned myself not to those torrents of feeling—those frenzied outbursts of emotion. Hope appeared to be dead within me, save and except during those occasional intervals when the fanciful vagaries of which I have spoken, would rise up in my mind. But the general tenour of my existence for some years past may be described as the long, long death of hope—that torpor of the senses which is experienced when one knows that there is naught left in the world to crave for. However, this day has suddenly changed all that!—it has given me back happiness—it has filled me with new joy—it has lifted up my soul from the depths of the sepulchre where it was benumbed—it has inspired me with fresh vitality, and with a renovated confidence in the world and in heaven!"

And again, as she spoke, did Lady Everton lavish caresses upon the Marquis of Eagledean; and he also felt that this was a day of indescribable happiness for him. They sat together for more than an hour, talking of their feelings rather than of the circumstances which demanded their attention: they dwelt upon the emotions they experienced, and not upon the plans which they had to discuss and execute. They spoke of Adolphus—of Elizabeth—and of Frank; and the tender mother made the Marquis give her the most life-like description which words could frame of the personal appearance of each of those beloved children of her's.

"And now, my dear Paton," she said, at length suddenly recollecting that after all their discourse nothing was settled—nothing resolved upon, "we must think of the future as well as of the present and the past. You can full well understand that I yearn to fold those dear ones in my arms—that this solitude has suddenly become hateful to me—that I long to fly hence and seek the spot where dwell the objects of my love. Tell me, Paton—tell me,—when you came hither this morning, had you any fixed plan to propose? any project to suggest?"

"My dear Alexandrina," he answered, "can you not perceive at a glance how much depended upon yourself? You bid me talk to you of the future

MADGE SOMERS.

The first word I must say is a question that I have to put,—a question that may seem precipitate, but on the response to which does so much of our future plans depend?"

"Paton, I understand you," replied Lady Everton. "If you still think me worthy of bearing your name, you know not the happiness and joy with which I shall receive it!"

The Marquis carried her hand to his lips, exclaiming, "This is the assurance that I alone required to make me happy! And now, my dear Alexandsina, there are two distinct alternatives which I have to submit to your consideration. I allude to the course to be adopted in respect to our two dear children, Elizabeth and Frank. Adolphus is with them: but he knows not that they are his half-brother and sister. Is he to remain in ignorance of this secret? or is he to be made acquainted with it? Those are the alternatives."

"Oh! my decision is given at once," replied Lady Everton. "Adolphus must know all—and God grant that he may not blush for his mother! When I become your wife, how can I possibly treat as comparative strangers—as visitors—or as guests, our dear Elizabeth and Frank? No, no: it were impossible! Let the world think what it will: our children must be acknowledged. I beseech and implore that you will grant me this! Whatever shame there may be to bear, it falls not on the man—it falls on the woman; it will not touch you—it will all become mine; and cheerfully, cheerfully shall I endure it rather than have to disavow those children who have been disavowed too long! I see things in a very different light from that in which I beheld them some years back. Tell me, then, that you will not be ashamed to own as your wife one whom the finger of scandal and scorn may perchance be pointed at when all the past becomes known!"

Lady Everton had spoken thus with a wild gushing vehemence which prevented the Marquis from giving an immediate reply. It was a perfect torrent of feelings,—the feelings of a mother who now knew no other consideration than the duty which she owed towards the children of her only love, and whom she longed to acknowledge as her own.

"It shall all be as you desire," answered the Marquis; "it is for you to decide. Oh! believe me, if you have strength enough to dare the opinion of the world, I have lived long enough to be too independent of it to sacrifice any of my own feelings to its prejudices. Be it therefore as you say, dearest Alexandrina; and rest assured that Adolphus will not blush for you, nor hesitate to own Elizabeth and Frank as a sister and a brother."

"Henceforth all our ideas of happiness," said Lady Everton, "shall be centred in domestic joys. If we be blessed in our children, what care we for the world? And you will be a father to Adolphus, will you not?——Yes, I know you will: for after all he has undergone—after that cruel and hideous captivity—his experience of the world must be circumscribed indeed, and he will require all the counsel and all the care which you can bestow upon him."

"He shall have it," responded the Marquis: "he shall be to me as dear as Elizabeth and Frank themselves. And let me add, my dear Alexandrina," he continued in a lower tone, "that the unsophisticated condition of Adolphus's mind—his inexperience in all worldly matters—his ignorance of the selfish motives which sway men's actions and opinions—and his appreciation of everything that is natural only, in contradistinction to everything that is artificial—will lead him to sympathize with a mother whose hand was sacrificed to one when her heart was engaged to another. No: there is not the slightest dread that Adolphus will blush when he learns that mother's history!"

"What more have we to discuss?" exclaimed Lady Everton, now all in feverish anxiety to flee away from her present abode and hasten to where she could fold her children in her arms: "when shall we depart? My preparations will soon be made: an hour—half-an-hour—a few minutes will suffice. Oh! pray tell me, dear Paton, that we are to go at once! But, Oh—I forgot!" she suddenly exclaimed: "you have travelled day and night—you only arrived here late last evening—you cannot undertake the journey homeward without adequate repose. How selfish I was! But you will pardon me—for I have become another being—you have given me new life,—I feel young—Oh! so young, that I can endure all possible fatigues!"

"There shall be no unnecessary delay," responded the Marquis. "Rest assured that I am as anxious as yourself for the arrival of that moment when Adolphus, Elizabeth, and Frank shall be folded in your arms. Yes: it will prove a spectacle that I long to gaze upon. Dear Alexandrina, though changed in appearance," he added with a smile, "I am not so old that I need nursing. It is now nearly three in the afternoon: if you choose to depart in an hour, let a post-chaise be sent for from the town. Or perhaps, you have your own travelling-carriage?"

"It has been unused for years," replied Lady Everton. "But we will have a post-chaise—we will commence our journey this evening—it will take us at least some distance towards the nearest line of railway connecting the principality with the metropolis. Worthy Mrs. Jameson and my faithful old footman Humphrey shall accompany us."

Having thus spoken, Lady Everton, who was full of a feverish excitement—presenting indeed a wondrous contrast to her slow, measured, and thoughtful movements when the Marquis had first beheld her in the morning walking in the garden,—Lady Everton, we say, in this new state of mind, flew to the bell; and when Humphrey made his appearance, she issued her instructions in a tone of cheerful volubility that filled the old man with delight. For the faithful dependant had already learnt from Mrs. Jameson who the visitor was, and the many glad tidings he had brought with him into Wales; so that he was overjoyed to read in his mistress's manner a confirmation of all he had thus heard.

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It was about six o'clock in the evening of the second day after the incidents which we have been relating, that a hired vehicle from a railway station approached Stamford Manor, and in a few minutes entered the grounds in the midst of which the house stood. Elizabeth, Frank, and Adolphus had not long risen from the dinner-table and retired to the

drawing-room, where they were seated at the moment when the sounds of wheels reached their ears. The approach of a vehicle made them all three start up: for they were anxiously expecting either the return of the Marquis, or some intelligence from him. They precipitated themselves down the stairs: but Lord Eagledean, rushing forth from the vehicle before they could perceive there was any one else with him whom he had left inside, met them in the hall, and bade them accompany him to a parlour opening thence.

"Now, Adolphus," he said, when he had embraced all three one after the other,—"and you likewise, Elizabeth and Frank, prepare yourselves to behold some one who is most dear to you."

"Our mother!" ejaculated Francis, heedless at the moment whether there were any longer the necessity to keep the secret from Adolphus.

"Yes—your mother, my dear boy," responded the Marquis, in a voice full of emotion; "and *your* mother likewise, my dear Adolphus. Yes: I speak truly! Embrace Elizabeth and Frank—for they are indeed your sister and your brother—and *your* mother is also *theirs!*"

Adolphus gave utterance to a cry of mingled amazement and joy: for without pausing to reflect how this could possibly be, his first feeling was one of ineffable delight to think that Elizabeth whom he already loved as a sister, was indeed a sister—and Frank whom he loved as a brother, was indeed a brother!"

"I go to fetch your mother," said the Marquis, in a hasty whisper to Elizabeth: "she longs to press you all three in her arms. During the few moments that I shall be absent you may tell Adolphus who I am——Yes, you may tell him that I am the Marquis of Eagledean."

Having thus spoken, he hastily quitted the room: but little more than a minute elapsed ere he returned again, accompanied by Lady Everton. Then ensued a scene which, for tenderness and excitement —for melting emotions and joyous outpourings alike of words and tears—for fervid embraces, repeated again, and again, and again—for fondest endearments and enthusiastic caresses, has had no parallel in this world.

CHAPTER XCI.

THE PREPARED PIT-FALL.

We must now pay another visit to Solomon Patch's public-house in Agar Town. It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening, when Madge Somers, dressed in her usual gipsy-like style,—but looking more travel-soiled, weary, and careworn than she had ever yet appeared,—dragged herself painfully into that den. She was evidently sinking with fatigue; and throwing herself upon a seat in the open space fronting the bar, she bade Solomon at once serve her with some liquor.

"You seem ill, or else very tired, observed the old man, as he presented her with a foaming pint of porter. "There! take that—and if it doesn't cheer you up a bit, then my name isn't what it be."

The woman placed the pint-measure to her lips, and did not remove it till she had poured the whole of its contents down her throat: then, as she handed back the vessel to Solomon Patch, she said, "Yes, I am indeed tired. I have walked many weary miles to-day, but was resolved to reach your place to-night. Let me see—what is the day of the month?"

"Well now, what be it?" asked the old man, turning towards his wife. "Why, the tenth of August, to be sure."

"Yes—the tenth," repeated Madge Somers: then in an under-tone to herself, she said, "It was the twenty-first of July the appointment was made:—in one month, day for day, and hour for hour, was I to meet him at his own house. That will be on the twenty-first instant at nine o'clock in the evening. Twenty days have elapsed, and I am no wiser than I was: I have eleven more days to find out what I want!"

"And what is it you do want, Madge?" asked Solomon Patch; for the woman had spoken those last words in a louder tone than the previous part of the sentence, and they had caught the landlord's ear. "I do really think she has lost her wits," he observed aside to three or four customers of the *Billy Goat*, who were lounging and tippling at the bar-counter.

"Not a bit of it!" said Madge Somers sternly: for her keen ears had caught the observation. "But you ask me what it is that I want to find out? Well, I have come here this evening to set every one who is in the habit of frequenting the place, on the alert to discover what I *do* want. Are there many people in the tap-room yonder?"

"Some dozen or so," replied Solomon; "and I tell you who's amongst them—an old pal of mine that I haven't seen for many a-day—Bob Shakerly."

"The resurrection-man," observed Madge Somers.

"Well, I don't think he does much in that way now," remarked Solomon: "cos why, he finds it more to his account to cut up osses for sassage-meat and what not. Howsumever, he's found his way down to the *Goat* this evening to smoke his pipe and take his rum-and-water: and there the old fellow is in the tap-room, as cozie as can be."

"Just come along with me, Solomon," said Madge: "and you also," she continued, addressing herself to the loungers about the bar.

"What on earth is she going to do now?" asked Solomon of himself, as Madge herself led the way into the public room, where the usual number of ill-looking fellows and half-tipsy women were pursuing their orgie, old Bob Shakerly being one of the company.

"Why, here's Madge Somers!" said Tony Wilkins: "and she looks as wild as if she was a witch."

"Witch indeed!" she echoed: "I am not witch enough to find out something that I want to discover—or rather I have not succeeded yet: but I will offer a prize and set all you folks on the alert, and see whether *that* will be productive of any good result."

As she thus spoke, she took from beneath her garments a greasy pocket-book; and opening it, drew forth a number of bank-notes. These she counted, keeping some in her hand and putting the rest back into the pocket-book,—her proceeding being watched with mingled curiosity and suspense by all who beheld her.

"Now, Solomon Patch," she said, turning towards the landlord, "here's fifty pounds in good Bank of England notes; and I am going to entrust the sum to your keeping. You are all witnesses of the deposit!"

"But what be it for?" asked the old man, gazing with astonishment upon Madge Somers, and almost hesitating to receive the money, lest some treacherous intent should lurk beneath this conduct on her part.

"Take it—do not be afraid," she said: "I will soon explain myself. And now listen, all of you! Some years ago there was the manager of a company of strolling-players, whose name was Thompson: but what has become of him, I do not know. It is precisely this knowledge that I want to obtain. If any one will bring me the information I require before eight o'clock in the evening of the twenty-first of this month, the individual thus giving me that information, shall receive the fifty pounds which I have just lodged in the hands of Solomon Patch."

Numerous voices shouted out the willingness of the speakers to enter upon the search.

"If he's above ground, I'm blowed if I don't ferret him out," exclaimed Tony Wilkins, darting from his seat with the air of one resolved to enter upon the search at once.

"I knows a many poor vimen as was vunce strolling performers," observed a half-tipsy female, with a hiccup at every second word she spoke: "it's astonishing how them poor creaturs comes down in their hold hage. There's vun as used to play queens and great ladies, and was very poppilar: but now she's took to get her livelihood by charing and what not."

"Oh, you be hanged!" ejaculated a rough-looking fellow, eager to put in his word. "I'll have a try for the fifty pound prize. But can't you give us no more partiklers, Madge?"

"Nothing more," she responded curtly.

"'Spose he's dead, this feller Thompson," observed Solomon Patch: "what then? It ain't no use looking arter him—be it?"

"Unless," remarked another of the women belonging to the company of revellers in the tap-room, "old Bob Shakerly here would have up his carkiss."

"A truce to this nonsense," interrupted Madge, with a severe look. "I have said what I wanted, and the reward is lodged in Solomon's hands. Those who like to undertake the search, can do it: those who don't, can leave it alone. But it may be that if the information is given to me at the time specified, I shall increase the amount of recompense according to my means."

"Unless she loses every skurrick she's got at the vimen's gaming-table on Saffron Hill," whispered one of the guests to another.

"Well, I'm off at once," said Tony Wilkins. "Fifty pounds! my eye, it isn't to be got every day!"

"One word more," exclaimed Madge Somers. "From seven to eight o'clock on the evening of the twenty-first of August, I shall be here to receive the information required, if any one is enabled to furnish it. But I expect positive proof of the accuracy of this information. In short, Sol Patch will not part with the reward until the intelligence that may be brought is shown to be correct."

Having thus spoken, Madge Somers turned abruptly round and issued from the room. Passing into the bar-parlour, she desired Mrs. Patch to give her some refreshments in the shape of eatables: and the order being obeyed, the woman commenced an attack upon the cold meat and other things placed before her, which showed that she must have been fasting some hours. Meanwhile Solomon Patch, having secured the fifty pounds in his strong-box, experienced no small degree of curiosity to learn wherefore Madge was so anxious to find out this Thompson of whom she had spoken. Bidding his wife attend to the bar, he passed into the room behind, with two glasses of hot spirits-and-water; and placing them upon the table, seated himself opposite to Madge Somers.

"Come," said he, "you won't refuse to drink, for old acquaintance' sake. Here's a health to you, and wishing that the business you've been a speaking of may turn out all right."

"I hope it will," she remarked abruptly. "What news in Agar Town? Anything fresh?"

"Nothing partikler," responded Solomon. "But about this little business of your'n, Madge—can I be of any assistance? Of course you must know summut more about the man Thompson than you've chose to say."

"Nothing," she observed: then in order to change the conversation, she asked, "Have you seen Chiffin lately?"

"Well, yes—I have," answered Solomon: and he seemed to speak with some little degree of hesitation.

"Is anything the matter with him?" asked Madge, looking at the old man fixedly: "anything turned up about that barge affair?"

"No—it all seems to have died away as comfortable as possible. But here he be:"—and as he spoke, the Cannibal, dressed in his usual style, entered the bar-parlour.

"Hullo, Madge!" he exclaimed: "who would have thought of seeing you here? Why, I've been up to your cottage yonder two or three times during the last week; and it was all shut up and as silent as a grave."

"Did you want me, then?" she asked.

"Well, I did rather. Just step along with me. Here, Sol, bring us up some liquor into the private room: for me and Madge have got some particular business to talk about."

"Ah! about them preparations that you've been making, I suppose," said the old man, with a sly look, full of dark and sinister meaning.

"Well, it may be," growled the Cannibal: "but don't you let your tongue run quite so free—'cos why, how did you know I was going to speak to Madge on that subject? and if I wasn't, then you would have made her suspect something."

"Oh! I only meant that if you are going to let her into the secret," replied Solomon, "I am glad of it: for she's a discreet woman, and you can trust her. Besides, as I won't do it myself——"

"Now hold your jaw, you cursed old fool," interposed Chiffin, his diabolical countenance contracting with an expression of hideous ferocity, while he grasped his club as if about to strike. "As you get old you become so precious talkative there's no doing

nothing with you. How do you know that what's said in here, if spoke too loud, isn't heard by the people at the bar?"

"I didn't mean no offence, Mr. Chiffin," said the old man, trembling from head to foot: for he stood fearfully in awe of the dreaded Cannibal.

"Well then, look sharp—bring us up some brandy—and lend us this light."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took up the candle from the table, and led the way from the bar, followed by Madge Somers. He ascended to that miserable-looking room up-stairs which has been before described in earlier chapters of this narrative; and placing the candle upon the table, he said, "Let us sit down, Madge: we've got some business to talk about. But wait a bit till old Solomon has brought up the lush and the glasses; and then we shall be all to ourselves."

Madge Somers made no remark; but with her usual imperturbability sat down, patiently awaiting the promised explanations. While casually casting her eyes round the small and cheerless-looking room, she suddenly observed that a door had been pierced on one side.

"I see that Solomon has been making some alterations in his house," she said to the Cannibal.

"Ah! you mean that door," he remarked, with a smile of grim and sinister meaning which did not escape the woman's notice. "You know where it leads to?"

"It must lead into Solomon's own bed-chamber," said Madge, after a moment's reflection, during which she passed in review the precise arrangements of the house and the distribution of the rooms, with all of which she was well acquainted. "To be sure! —that door on the landing leads into Solomon's chamber: but what has made him have another door made, communicating from this room?"

"I'll tell you all about it presently," returned Chiffin, with another peculiar smile, which was about as pleasing as the grin of some horrible monster.

At this moment Solomon made his appearance with the liquor that had been ordered; and as he placed the tray upon the table, he threw a significant look at that new door which had been made—then bent his eyes upon Chiffin—next on Madge—and then retreated from the room, closing the outer door behind him.

"Now, perhaps," said Madge Somers, "you will begin your explanations, and tell me what you want with me: because I can assure you my time is fully occupied."

"Then I suppose you've got plenty of business on hand?" said Chiffin, mixing himself a tumbler of brandy-and-water.

"Yes—you know full well that I am seldom idle. But you seem busy also. By the bye, I thought the last time I saw you, Chiffin, you intended to take a public-house or settle down in some fashion or another. Don't you remember when and where it was? That night, on the bank of the canal——"

"I recollect all about it," interrupted the Cannibal savagely, as if he did not over and above like the particular allusion thus made. "It was when you came to bring me the news that Lady Saxondale didn't mean to let the detectives go on against me and Tony Wilkins. Of course you guessed very well who it was that did the business for that scoundrel Tugs and his wife——they meant to do for me and get all my money: but I'm blowed if I didn't do for them!"

"It served them right," remarked Madge coolly. "But what business have you in hand?"

"Something that will put a decent sum into my pocket," answered Chiffin; "and then with what I have got already, I shall be ready to retire from business altogether," he added with a chuckling laugh; "and instead of taking boozing-kens or lodging-houses, or anything of that sort, I shall settle down as a genelman and live on my means. But as you have let me into a many good things with you, I'll let you into this with me—leastways, I want some one to help in doing a certain thing; and as old Solomon won't have anything to do with it himself, I thought of you. So I have been up to your place two or three times, but couldn't find you——"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Madge: "you have found me at last. Here I am—and now for your explanations. What do you want me for? and what can I get by helping you?"

"Fifty guineas," responded the Cannibal; "and only for a few minutes' work."

"Well, proceed. My time is occupied: but still I can spare enough for your purpose, particularly if it is to be well paid."

The Cannibal drew his seat a little closer to that where Madge was placed; and having drained his tumbler, and mixed himself another jorum of hot brandy-and-water, he addressed her in the following manner:—

"I am not going to mention any names, 'cause why it isn't necessary. But you must know that there's a certain party who wants two other parties put out of the way. It's two genelmen whose disappearance I have got to bring about. The hint how to do it was given me by the lady—for it *is* a lady—and I don't mind saying this much—who is employing me. She doesn't want these two genelmen to have their throats cut and their bodies found any where above ground, which would only cause an immense sensation, as the newspapers say, and lead to no end of inquiries. But what she wants is for these two genelmen to slip out of the world just as easy as if the earth opened and swallowed them up—so that there sha'n't remain the least clue to show where they have gone. Their friends and relations may fancy they have ran away, or anything they like: but that's no business of mine. It's enough for me to know that if these two genelmen disappear all snug and comfortable, with no chance of never turning up no more, I shall get two——I mean a decentish sum, out of which I can afford to pay you fifty for helping me."

"Go on," said Madge, imperturbably. "I am listening."

"Well, you see," proceeded Chiffin, "I sha'n't be at any loss to entice those two genelmen here; because I know how to do it, and have got an excuse ready. And what's more too, I have got the arrangements all made, settled, and done, to send them out of existence much nicer and easier than if they was let down on the drop at the Old Bailey: 'cause why, *here* there won't be no ropes round their necks to break their fall and hold 'em up tight."

"Go on," said Madge again, her countenance now exhibiting some degree of interest.

"Come and look here," said Chiffin.

Taking up the candle, he opened that newly made door which had already engaged the woman's notice, and led her into the adjoining room, which for many years had served as the chamber where Solomon Patch and his wife were wont to sleep. Madge, as before stated, knew it well: but she now found it completely changed. The bed had been removed—it was no longer fitted as a sleeping-room at all, but was arranged as a parlour; though still meanly enough furnished. There were a few windsor chairs; a table stood upon a carpet about twelve feet square; and a large piece of furniture, like a bureau, was placed against the original door of communication, which opened from the landing. This door we will henceforth call the *old one*, to prevent any confusion when speaking of the *new one* which had been made to communicate with the adjoining room.

"Well," said Madge Somers, glancing around, "I perceive all the changes that have taken place here: but I cannot understand their purpose."

"I will soon tell you," replied Chiffin, with another of his half-ferocious half-sinister grins, accompanied too with a low chuckling laugh. "It was lucky I knew a capital feller of a carpenter, and another good chap of a bricklayer—two blades of our own sort, and who were glad enough to work for a friend like me as long as they were well paid. Why, I was forced to give old Solomon fifty guineas to let me pull his house to pieces like this here. But I tell you what's more—I have humbugged him," added Chiffin, lowering his voice to a whisper, "that I will take the *Billy Goat* off his hands, and give him a thousand pounds for the good will. He knows I have got the best part of the blunt, and shall have the rest: and so he bit at it directly."

Madge Somers was too keen and penetrating not to have already suspected, from what the Cannibal had been saying, that the changed but tranquil aspect of the room concealed some preparations fearfully treacherous; and she bent a look of augmenting curiosity upon the Cannibal.

"Now, Madge," he said, continuing to speak in a low mysterious voice, "you will understand it all in a few minutes. Didn't you know that in one of the cellars underneath this house, there's a thundering deep well, which hasn't been used for a great many years, because somehow or another the water was found to be putrid. It may be that a dead body found its way to the bottom a long time ago, which made the water bad: but whether or not, the well has never been used for the last fifteen years, and the mouth of it in the cellar was covered up with paving stones. Well, the next thing I must remind you of is, that underneath this room where we are standing—and therefore betwixt this floor and the ceiling of the cellar—there's that scullery-place which old Sol and his wife have never used except to put odd things in. One of the very first things that I had done, was to have the bricklayer and brick up the window of the scullery that looks into the back yard—all natural enough, 'cos why the window was broken out and Solomon pretended to be afraid that some of the queer chaps which frequents the house might get in through that way and pay a visit to the premises which they are so familiar with. The next thing was to make a large hole in the scullery floor, which formed an opening, as you can very well understand, into the cellar; and of course it was managed that this opening should be just above the mouth of the well. The third thing to be done was to cut a square out of this floor here where we are standing——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Madge, for a moment losing her presence of mind, as Chiffin pointed with his club down towards the carpet—and she instinctively started back.

"Why, you ain't such a fool," he exclaimed, with a chuckling laugh, "to think that I am going to send you right bang through to the bottom, are you? Not I, indeed! You've never done me no harm, but some good turns at times——"

"Go on," said Madge, instantaneously recovering her self-possession: "but it was enough to make one start to know that one was standing upon a trap-door which might suddenly fall like a gibbet-drop beneath the feet."

"Yes: and it's arranged just like a gibbet-drop too! Look here—the trap-door is exactly in this spot:"—and Chiffin kicked aside the carpet as he spoke, showing that the square cut out of the floor was just between the threshold of the new door that had been formed, and the table.

"I understand," observed Madge. "You expect that the two gentlemen who are to be so pleasantly disposed of, will pass, one close upon the heels of the other, through this new door; and then the instant they stand on the trap-door, down it is to fall!"

"If you had concocted it all yourself, you couldn't have described it better," observed the Cannibal. "You see, I shall lead the way, as if it was all fair and right enough, and make believe as if I was going to sit down with them swell coves to deliberate at this table. They will follow—and then, as you have so well twigged it, down they must go! You see, on account of the situation of the well underneath, it was necessary to have the trap-door exactly in this spot; and therefore it would not have done to introduce them by the *old door*. If so, when coming in, they would pass clear of the trap. Now, as it is, the moment they pass the threshold of the *new door*, they put their feet on the trap, and it's done in a jiffey."

"And the assistance you require of me," said Madge, now fully penetrating the object for which her own services were needed, "is to pull the bolt, or touch the secret spring, or whatever the contrivance is, just at the proper instant?"

"Right again, old gal!" answered Chiffin. "You see that great lumbering bit of furniture against the old door. Well, it's nothing but front and sides—the back and the shelves are all taken out; and so any person can hide inside of it. That's the place where you will be. There's a hole in the front here —— look, you see it —— where you can peep through. You will have to go on your knees, because the spring that lets the trap fall is in the floor just behind that furniture. So, when once you have plumped down on your knees —— not to say your prayers," parenthetically observed the Cannibal, with another diabolical laugh —— "you can peep with one eye through the hole, and catch hold of the iron knob of the spring with one hand at the same time. It works precious easy, as I will show you when the moment comes. But you must take precious good care not to let *me* down through the trap instead of the two genelmen."

Again did Chiffin indulge in a coarse but subdued guffaw; while Madge Somers, with her wonted imperturbability, remarked, "Don't be afraid—I shall be looking out for my reward, and as it will be in your pocket I shall not send you down into the well. But when do you think this business is likely to take place?"

"I only wanted somebody that I could rely upon to help," answered Chiffin, "in order to take the necessary measures to get the two genelmen here as soon as possible. Now that I have seen you, and you've agreed, I'll set about it without delay. Perhaps, if you was to call here the day after to-morrow, I should be able to tell you more. Or shall I look up at the cottage?"

"No—I shall not be found there," answered Madge.

"Well, I think it was high time for you to leave that wretched tumble-down crib," observed the Cannibal. "You will call here——eh?"

"Yes—the day after to-morrow. If you are busy elsewhere, leave word with old Sol when I am likely to be wanted, and I will be punctual. And now, if you have nothing more to say, I shall wish you good night."

"Good night, Madge. But I say, by the bye," exclaimed Chiffin, "do you happen to have seen that Lady Saxondale of late—she, you know, that rag and Tony——"

"As if I did not know perfectly well who you mean," interrupted Madge, fixing her eyes keenly upon the Cannibal for a moment, and then averting them.

"Of course—because you stalled her off from setting the detectives to work. How the deuce did you manage to have any influence with her?"

"We will talk upon that subject another day," responded the woman.

"Yes: and then may be——But no matter," said the Cannibal, interrupting himself: for he was afraid if he let drop any more, Madge would suspect that her ladyship was his employer in the present business, and that if she found out he had been promised the enormous sum of two thousand guineas for accomplishing the diabolical deed, she would not be contented with the fifty guineas which he had offered for her assistance.

"Good night," said Madge once more: and she thereupon took her departure from Solomon Patch's boozing-ken.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE FEMALE GAMESTERS.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when Madge Somers emerged from the precincts of Agar Town. For a little while she walked on slowly and thoughtfully, as if pondering deeply on all that had taken place at Solomon Patch's, and likewise hesitating as to what particular course she should pursue. But by degrees her thoughts settled themselves into a resolution; and when this was once taken, she quickened her pace as she proceeded on her way. She reached King's Cross, and passed down Gray's Inn Road. In half-an-hour from the time she left Agar Town, she drew near the maze of streets, alleys, and courts which constitute that vile district whereof Saffron Hill may be deemed the principal thoroughfare. Still she walked on; and, at length, on reaching Saffron Hill itself, suddenly stopped short.

"No," she said, in subdued but vehement ejaculation: "I will *not* go there again! I have a duty to perform—and it must be done."

Nevertheless, there appeared to be an inclination in this woman's mind stronger than that sense of duty to which she had alluded; and while she fain would have obeyed the latter, she was irresistibly urged on by the former. She advanced for some twenty or thirty yards, and then stopped short again: a powerful struggle was taking place within her. But her weak point proved the stronger one, paradoxical as the expression may seem;—and still she walked on. On reaching the entrance of a court, dismal and dark as the mouth of a cave, she paused once more—she endeavoured to turn her steps in another direction—but her evil genius prevailed: she plunged into a court—and muttering to herself, "Only just for one short half-hour!" knocked three times at the door of a house at the farther extremity.

It was opened in a few moments by a female; and a light glimmered faintly forth: but the door was only thus opened to the length of a chain which held it secure, until Madge Somers mentioned her name: for in the darkness of that court her countenance was scarcely discernible even with the glimmering light that struggled out. Then the chain was let loose—the door opened—and she exchanged a few words with the female who had thus given her admittance. This was the mistress of the house—the presiding genius of one of the vilest dens which then existed, or still exist, in the British metropolis. She was an elderly woman, with a pale ghost-like countenance, and small dark eyes, glittering like those of a reptile, but looking larger than they were by reason of the blue circles of the hollow caverns wherein they were set. Her features were sharp—even painfully thin; and her mouth, surrounded by wrinkles, was drawn in with a constant habit of compression. Some grizzly gray hair escaped from beneath a dirty white cap, which added to the corpse-like appearance of her countenance. Her figure was lean and shrivelled: she wore a soiled rusty black stuff gown, and seemed to have but very little under-clothing—for the skirt fell straight, without the slightest bulging out from the waist. Altogether she was a hideous-looking creature—not merely repulsive, but a woman whose aspect was sufficient to make a beholder afraid. A capacity for any wickedness was as legibly imprinted upon that vile countenance, as if her character had been printed thereon.

She led the way down a narrow, dirty, dilapidated staircase, into a back kitchen. This place was not more than fifteen feet square, and all the centre was occupied by a large deal table. There was a rude form on each side, and a wooden stool at either extremity. Two tallow-candles in brass sticks stood upon the table, around which were crowded—indeed, huddled as closely as they could pack themselves—a number of females, whose ages ranged from the young girl of thirteen or fourteen to the old hag of seventy or eighty. The heat was stifling, but the company present appeared not to feel the least inconvenience from that sickly atmosphere,—

all their thoughts and all their senses being absorbed in the occupation that was going on. And this was gambling.

Yes: it was a gambling-house for females. None of the other sex were admitted there; and only those who were well known to the mistress of the den, or who were properly introduced by old-standing friends, could obtain ingress thither. At the head of the table sat a woman who was as much like the one we have already described as any human being can possibly resemble another. Indeed, they were sisters: but it was the elder one, who had admitted Madge Somers, that was the mistress of the place—the other was merely paid by the first-named to conduct the gaming-table. We are thus minute as to particulars, because it is no imaginary den which we are describing, but one which existed at the period whereof we are writing.

The woman who presided at the gaming-table, kept a regular "bank"—just the same as at the great gambling-houses of the West End, one of which we described in an earlier chapter of this narrative. The "bank," which was contained in a tin box with three distinct compartments, consisted of gold, silver, and copper money; and the woman who acted as *croupiere*, had a wooden rake to gather up or push the coin about in the most approved style of the avocation. An imperturbable gravity rested upon her thin ghastly countenance; and if there were any personal trait in which she differed from her elder sister, it was that her eyes, though equally as sinister in expression, had a more steady gaze: but when fixed upon you, they produced the horrible effect of a snake that glares intently upon your countenance!

The female gamblers, assembled in this den, were not entirely of that excessively low description which the reader may possibly have anticipated at the outset. There were several women amongst them who, by their appearance, were evidently the wives of small shopkeepers residing in the neighbourhood: but three or four of the youngest were prostitutes, who plied their hideous calling in that vicinage, and who, when they obtained a few pence or shillings, rushed to this den in the hope of increasing by one vice the gains derived from another.

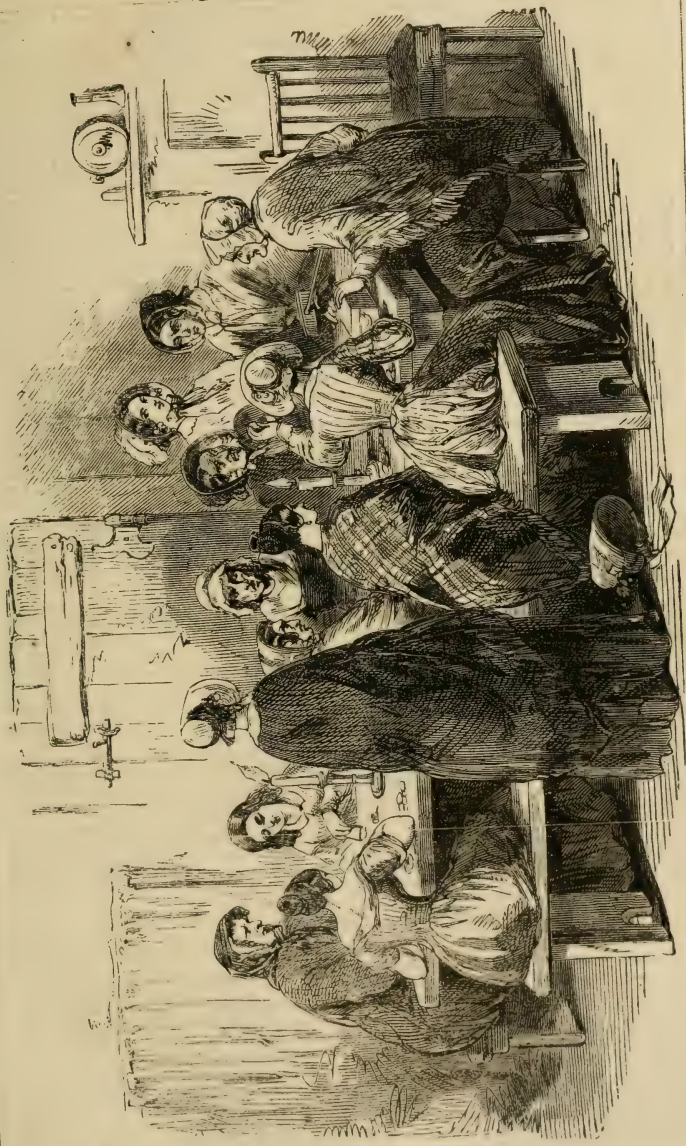
If we were to take a peep into the front kitchen of the house to which we have introduced the reader, we should find ample preparations in progress for a supper that was to wind up the night's amusements. A large table, twice the size of that in the back kitchen, was spread for at least four-and-twenty guests. A number of black-handled knives and forks, pewter pots, metal salt-cellars, pepper-castors, and mustard-pots, were spread upon a dirty cloth; and at an immense fire a horrid-looking old woman, evidently half-tipsy and who took quantities of snuff in the filthiest manner possible, was superintending the culinary process. A leg of mutton and a leg of pork, roasting in front of the grate, were both basted with the gravy that dripped from each and which united in a large yellow pie-dish set to catch it. Upon the fire, another leg of pork and another leg of mutton were boiling in an enormous cauldron, together with a piece of beef; and divers saucepans contained proportionate quantities of vegetables. It may be thought that these masses of provisions were immense considering that the table was laid but for two dozen guests: but when it is stated that each one of those guests would anon be prepared to attack the provender with the utmost voracity, and to eat as long as the physical capacity would allow, it will be seen that the preparations were by no means on too large a scale. We must add that this supper was given gratuitously to all the frequenters of the house, who might drop in between the hours of nine in the evening and one in the morning to take their chance at the gaming-table. The supper, thus provided without cost to the devourers, was a great allurement for the establishment: but the profits of the gaming-table were ample enough to permit this spread to be given nightly.

All the upper part of the house remained unoccupied, except by the two sisters and the old cook: no lodgers were received, the great aim being to keep the real nature of the place as secret as possible. The elder sister, who was the mistress of the establishment, had kept it for years. She had amassed several thousand pounds; and in one of the northern suburbs of London there is a row of some ten or a dozen small cottages, built by means of that money upon freehold land, and all this infamous woman's property!

It was to the den which we have been describing that Madge Somers paid a visit after leaving Solomon Patch's house in Agar Town; and she was evidently as well known at the former as at the latter place—for on entering the back-kitchen, nods of recognition passed between herself and the assembled female-gamesters. But few words were exchanged, as all were too intent on the chances of the dice to have much thought for other subjects. The stool at the foot of the table being vacant, Madge took it: and for some minutes she watched the game with the eagerness of one of its most impassioned votaries. All recollection of that duty which she had imposed upon herself, and which had more than once made her hesitate when on her way thither from Agar Town, was now lost sight of; she had no thought, no sense, no faculty for anything save and except the game that was progressing. At the expiration of about ten minutes, she drew forth her greasy old pocket-book, and producing a bank note, requested change of the *croupiere*. This was immediately given; and she staked a sovereign. She lost. Again she paused for a few minutes, ere she ventured another coin: but presently the chances of the dice seemed favourable once more, and a second piece of gold was staked. Now she won. Then followed a run of luck; and in about ten minutes twenty sovereigns were piled up before her. With a kind of desperate resolution she rose from her seat, and said she should go: but she was immediately assailed by numerous entreaties on the part of the players, "that she would take *one* more chance."

She wavered—the entreaties were pressed: she consented—and sat down again. In another ten minutes the pile of gold had disappeared; and another note from her pocket-book was changed. The run of luck was now against her, while a young girl of barely fourteen, who had commenced that evening with a few coppers, had ten or a dozen sovereigns in front of her.

The game continued; and presently the mistress of the establishment, who had quitted the back-kitchen almost immediately after Madge's arrival,



re-appeared, bearing a tray on which was a single wine-glass, while in her right hand she carried a large stone jar. This contained gin—or rather a compound of the woman's own concoction, consisting of some of the distiller's spirit, with a very large amount of vitriol and sugared water. She filled the wine-glass, and presented it to the young girl who was winning gold. The lost creature took it and poured its contents with avidity down her throat, giving a sigh of pleasure when she had imbibed the deleterious fluid. The glass was re-filled, and presented to the female who sat next. In this manner it went the complete round—Madge Somers being the only person who did not accept the proffered dram: for of all her vices a love of ardent spirits was not one.

The fiery liquor gave an unnatural exhilaration to the spirits of those who were already excited by the fluctuating chances of the game. But it must be confessed that the whole proceedings of this den were in one sense orderly enough. If ever a player attempted to quarrel, or disputed some particular point, she was instantaneously called to order by the *croupiere*, and the effect was truly magical—for that woman had contrived to establish a despotic authority over the frequenters of the house, and thus was she invaluable to her elder sister. An occasional oath passed unnoticed: but if anything really obscene or disgusting was said, it immediately called forth a severe rebuke, accompanied by a threat of expulsion—in which menace the generality of the players seemed perfectly ready to back the *croupiere*; for it must be understood, as already hinted, that there were several females present who called themselves "respectable married women."

It requires but little effort of the imagination to penetrate the circumstances under which some of these "respectable married women" visited this den. We may suppose one to be the wife of a man keeping a potato and coal shed; that she had gone out to collect a few little debts owing by the poorer customers in that neighbourhood; and that with the few shillings thus gathered into her purse she dropped in with the hope of converting them into as many guineas. If she lost, she would go home full of excuses to her husband: the debtors had not paid—she had fallen in with her friend Mrs. So-and-so, who had engaged her to supper—and hence her coming home so late. Perhaps the husband himself was at the public-house; and reeling home half-tipsy at a still later hour, was unaware of the time when his wife had entered. Very likely a quarrel might take place, originating on one side or the other: but what might be still more certainly reckoned upon, was that in the long run the principal profits of the business would go into the pocket of the woman keeping the gambling den, and insolvency would overtake the potato and coal shed.

From the little sketch thus hurriedly given, the reader may form an idea of that class of "respectable married females" who frequented the den. There are at this moment several gambling-houses for females in London; and many a small tradesman finds out to his cost, that his wife has been allured to one of these *pandemonia*. As a matter of course, the idea of those who frequent such places is, as we have above hinted, that they will convert their pence into shillings, and their shillings into pounds. Insensate fools! infatuated wretches! If they only paused and reflected for a single moment, they would perceive that the keeper of the gaming-house alone nets the profit—and that this profit is to the loss of the gamesters themselves.

But to return to the thread of our narrative: Madge Somers continued playing—at first cautiously, as we have seen her—then, as she lost, with a growing recklessness—and ultimately, as her losses increased, with a kind of desperation. She did not give way to any outburst of passion—she neither vociferated nor gesticulated: but her looks, her attitude, her entire bearing indicated one prolonged, continuous, and concentrated sense of terrific excitement. Now her eyebrows were drawn up—now they became corrugated: now her half-open mouth and the suspended breath showed the poignancy of her suspense—then the nervous quickness with which she drew forth another note and hazarded another stake, served as a farther proof of the desperate recklessness with which she was playing. Ultimately, at about two o'clock in the morning, she rose from her seat at the foot of the table,—muttering to herself, "Not a shilling left! no, not a penny!"

But still she thrust her long bony fingers into every recess of the greasy old pocket book, to ascertain if perchance a bank-note, or even a sovereign might have become embedded in some corner. No: it was empty—and she was indeed penniless. The remains of the last sum of money she had received from Lady Saxondale had that night been swallowed up in the same vortex to which hundreds and hundreds of pounds of the woman's money—the ill-gotten gains of long years of crime—had already found their way.

"Now then for supper!" ejaculated that same young girl whom we have already noticed as being in Fortune's favour on this particular night: and well she might speak exultingly; for she was the possessor of thirty golden sovereigns—a sum that appeared to her a colossal fortune.

"You will stay and take some supper, Madge?" said the elder sister of the two who presided over that den of infamy.

"Not I. You know I never stay to supper," responded Madge Somers: and then, in a savage tone, she added, "Come and open the door, and let me get away as quick as ever I can."

The keeper of the gambling-house was too well accustomed to Madge Somers' eccentric moods to take any notice of the present one; and she accordingly gave the inveterate female-gamester prompt egress from the place.

CHAPTER XCIII.

WILLIAM AND ANGELA.

It was on the evening of the day following the incidents recorded in the previous chapter, that, between eight and nine o'clock, William Deveril and his sister Angela were seated together in the ground-floor parlour of their beautiful little villa near the Regent's Park. The weather was warm, even to sultriness: for there was not the slightest breeze to dispel the heat which the sun of a glowing August day had left behind after sinking into its western home. The curtains had within a few

minutes been drawn over the window: but the casement itself was open. A lamp burnt on the table; and its light shone upon the handsome countenance of the young artist, and on the enchanting features of his sister, as they conversed together in a cheerful strain.

An angel in loveliness as well as in name, that beauteous creature might well be described as the most ravishing embodiment of female charms ever beheld by mortal eyes. We delineated her portrait in one of the earliest chapters of this narrative, when she appeared upon the stage of the Opera: we described her when she burst upon the delighted vision of the thousands gathered there to pour forth their enthusiastic plaudits, which were as much a tribute to her matchless beauty as to her proficiency in the dance. We beheld her *then*, expressing and personifying the poetry of motion with sylph-like delicacy and winning grace. We *now* behold her at home, beneath her own roof—plainly but tastefully attired; and though the brilliancy of the portrait may be somewhat subdued, yet has it lost nothing of its beauty. The dress which she now wears, sets off the exquisite symmetry of her shape to as much advantage as did the aerial drapery which she wore upon the stage: the statuesque contours of her full and graceful form are developed, while at the same time they are concealed, by the costume which now clothes them. Her shining dark hair falls in massive tresses upon the softly-rounded shoulders: her eyes, so large and dark, beam with the holiest lustre of purity and innocence. Bright as are those regards, yet are they full of a virginal chastity: for her's were looks which angels themselves might bend upon earth from the sunny regions of heaven. It needed but a single glance at Angela Deveril to convince the beholder that virtue had chosen her fair bosom as a temple wherein to establish its home, and that the purity of her thoughts had not been marred by her contact with the theatrical sphere.

We said that the brother and sister were conversing cheerfully; and it was so. For was not William now happy in his love for the beauteous Florina Staunton? and was not Angela happy at the success which thus promised to crown her brother's highest aspirations? She herself knew not what love was—she had never known it—naught beyond the love which she had experienced for her parents, and which she felt for her brother: but to that *other* love which glowed in *his* heart towards Florina, and which Florina reciprocated so tenderly and so devotedly, the unsophisticated Angela was utterly a stranger. She however saw that it was potent to produce happiness or misery; and now that it was creative of the former feeling in respect to her brother, she rejoiced that she should know it and acknowledge its empire.

But let us listen to some part of the conversation which is taking place between them.

"It is close upon nine o'clock," said William, looking at his watch; "and our kind friend Mr. Gunthorpe is always punctual."

"What think you, dear William, that he can mean," asked Angela, "by that expression in his note of yesterday, which bade us prepare for some strange revelations in respect to himself?"

"I cannot conceive, sweet sister," responded our hero "But this I do know, and am rejoiced at—— that in the same letter he emphatically repeated the assurance he gave me a little while ago, that you were to bid adieu to the stage."

"Ah! is he not benevolent? is he not good?" exclaimed Angela. "How is it that we have found so much favour in his sight?"

"He is one of those men," responded William, "who are delighted in doing good. I fear from certain expressions which he has at times let drop, that he has known much care and sorrow in past years: but instead of hardening his heart—instead of embittering his feelings against the world—whatsoever sufferings he has experienced, have only tended to enlarge his philanthropy. There are few men like Mr. Gunthorpe, Angela; and there are few persons who, like us, possess so dear and valued a friend."

"It is indeed a source of infinite congratulation for ourselves," rejoined Angela: then after a few moments' pause, she observed, "You were not long with Lady Florina to day."

"No, dear sister—because she also was expecting a visit from Mr. Gunthorpe. He had intimated his intention of calling in Cavendish Square at about three o'clock; and it appeared that Lady Florina was likewise to hear something of importance relative to him. I therefore limited my visit. Besides, dear Angela, I do not choose to leave you too much alone. But, Ah! there is another point in Mr. Gunthorpe's note to us, which has given me the most unfeigned delight—I mean his promise that Lady Macdonald and Florina shall call upon you here to-morrow, to make your acquaintance and embrace you as my sister. This will indeed be a happiness for me! You will love Florina——"

"Yes—for your sake as well as for her own, dear William. I am sure that the object of your love must be one meriting the highest esteem and admiration."

"Oh, she is! she is!" cried Deveril enthusiastically: "she is one of the few flowers that do not sicken and wither in the tainted atmosphere of fashionable life."

"Ah, that wicked Lady Saxondale," said Angela, "to have spread such a story concerning you! But what course is now to be adopted with regard to her?"

"Doubtless Mr. Gunthorpe will inform us presently," replied Deveril. "The matter rests entirely in his hands."

"Do you not wonder, William, how it is that our good old friend possesses such influence with Lady Macdonald? It must be as we have conjectured—that he is the very intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Yes—he himself has told me as much," replied Deveril. "But, Ah! here he is!" he ejaculated, as the sounds of carriage-wheels reached his ears through the open casement.

The brother and sister rose from their seats, and hastened to the front-door to meet the visitor, who proved to be the individual whom they were expecting. There were kind greetings and grasping of hands—and in a few moments the nobleman was seated between William and Angela in the elegantly furnished parlour. Now that the light of the lamp shone upon his features, they were both surprised as well as rejoiced to observe that he had an altered look,—but a look that was changed for the better. it was an expression of

countenance indicative of heartfelt satisfaction and joy.

"Ah! my dear young friends," he said, smiling upon them both, "you doubtless perceive some little alteration in me?—and it is so. Thank heaven, I find myself destined, in my declining years, to experience a happiness which for a long, long time past I had never dared hope to enjoy."

"You, Mr. Gunthorpe," said Angela, her sweet musical voice being tremulous with emotions,—"who are always studying to do good to others, richly deserve whatsoever happiness has now become your lot."

"And believe me, my dear Angela," responded the nobleman, "that in my own felicity I shall not forget the pleasing duty of ensuring the felicity of others. First with regard to yourself, William," he continued, now specially addressing himself to our young hero: "I must explain the measures which I have adopted to ensure your welfare. I have this day seen your Florina, and have told her many things with which she was previously unacquainted. Of some of those things her aunt Lady Macdonald was already aware, though she had kept them profoundly secret: but even she knew not all. Now they are both acquainted with everything that concerns me. In a few weeks, William, you shall conduct Florina to the altar. It is my purpose to settle upon you an income of two thousand a year——"

"No, Mr. Gunthorpe—impossible! impossible!" exclaimed William, well nigh overwhelmed by this surprising munificence. "I could not thus become dependant on your bounty. Pardon me, my dear sir, for speaking thus frankly—you will not attribute it to ingratitude on my part——"

"I attribute it to the proper feeling which inspires you, my young friend; and I honour you for it. But it suits my purpose and my intentions to give you this income. I will tell you why. Florina has certain claims upon me—and it is to her that I make this bequest. But as I cannot endure the idea of a husband being dependant on his wife, I choose to settle the money upon you instead of upon herself. Why, my dear boy, if you mean to marry a young lady of her rank, you must have a suitable income: and as for your toiling to earn a livelihood, it must not be thought of. You shall pursue your studies by way of amusement—and that is all. Now, don't interrupt me—I am doing everything for the best; and perhaps I shall tell you something presently which will show you that Florina has a perfect right to expect all this at my hands."

"My dear sir, I am at a loss for words," said William, profoundly affected, yet still loth to give an assent to the pecuniary arrangements proposed, —"I know not how to express myself——"

"But I can understand all that you would say," interrupted his good old friend. "And now, Angela," he continued, turning towards the young lady, adown whose cheeks the tears of mingled joy and gratitude were trickling;—for great indeed was that joy, and fervid also was that gratitude which she experienced towards the noble-hearted philanthropist who was displaying such splendid munificence towards her brother: "now, dear Angela," he said, "one word relative to yourself. Your engagement at the Opera was for one season—and that season is over. I dare say you have already had an offer from the manager to renew it for the following season—and doubtless plenty of offers from directors of the Continental Operas. But you will refuse each and all. At the same time you are not to be dependent upon your brother—although I know full well that everything he possesses is your's, and everything you possess is reciprocally his. But he and Florina must have their income to themselves; and you shall have your's. So you will permit me to settle upon you five hundred a-year——"

"Mr. Gunthorpe," interrupted the young lady, "so much bounty on your part——"

"Do not say a word!" he cried. "I am rich—this you knew all along—but I am far richer than you ever imagined. Had not my own circumstances altered in another sense—as I will presently explain—I should have done much more for Florina, whereby you, William, would have been benefited. Ah! now I perceive that you both are simultaneously struck with the same suspicion—you have penetrated the secret I was about to reveal to your ears—you see that I am no longer plain and humble Mr. Gunthorpe——"

"No, my lord," said William Deveril; "you are—you must be—the Marquis of Eagledean himself!"

As he thus spoke, our young hero rose from his chair with a feeling of profound respect towards that good nobleman: while, on the other side, Angela sank upon her knees, and taking his hand, murmured, "My lord, we cannot love or revere you more than if you had remained as we had hitherto known you!"

"My dear young friends," exclaimed the Marquis, compelling William to resume his seat on one side, and Angela to rise from her knees on the other,—"I have studied the excellence of your dispositions—I have marked the purity of your lives—and even if my duty towards my niece Florina had not impelled me to bestow a fortune to enable her to become your wife, William, I should nevertheless have given yourself and your amiable sister a proof of my regard. And now listen to me, while I relate many strange things: for I purpose to keep no secrets from you, as henceforth you will be welcome and honoured guests at my dwelling, and there are beings beneath that roof to whom I long to present you."

The Marquis of Eagledean then proceeded to relate the history of his love for Lady Everton, and most of those details which are already known to the reader. But we need scarcely observe that he did *not* draw aside the veil from those lamentable circumstances which entered into the past career of his daughter Elizabeth Paton; and with these exceptions, he recapitulated all the facts which have occupied so many of the previous chapters of our narrative. William and Angela listened with feelings of the deepest interest; and when the Marquis had concluded, they proffered their congratulations on his altered position in life, now that he had found two children whom he loved, and was on the eve of being united to the object of his first and only affections.

"William," continued the Marquis, "there is one more subject on which we have to converse. I allude to those proceedings that we have threatened

to take against Lady Saxondale. You are now aware that Lord Harold Staunton is my nephew. I more than fear—indeed, it is certain from what we already know—that this bad woman has contrived to obtain no small degree of influence over him. It is my duty as well as my wish to rescue him from the circle of her fascinations. But considering the empire which she must have gained over his heart, to have been enabled to make him her instrument in the endeavour to take away your life, it can only be by revealing her true character to him in the blackest lyes, that he may be weaned from his infatuation. I do not imagine that he is aware of the fact that she, for some deep and dark purposes of her own, was in correspondence with that dreadful character—the man Chiffin. It is necessary to ascertain for what purpose that man's services were required by her ladyship. Previous to leaving London, I sent a note to that man at the public-house in Agar Town, desiring him to let me know if anything new transpired in respect to Lady Saxondale, and telling him where he might send a letter to me. Of course I failed not to hint that his reward should be ample; and he has already had proofs that I am not niggard with my gold."

"And has he answered your lordship?" inquired Deveril: "have you heard anything from him?"

"This very afternoon, on my return home from Cavendish Square," replied the Marquis, "I found a note from Chiffin. In that scrawl he desires me, accompanied by yourself, to pay another visit to that den in Agar Town—to-morrow evening at nine o'clock—when he promises to have the most important information to communicate."

"Oh, my lord!" said Angela, over whose countenance a shade had fallen; "do you not fear to expose yourselves to the dangers of that horrible den, and to the possible treachery of that dreadful man?"

"My sweet girl," responded the Marquis, in a benevolent tone of reassurance and encouragement, "you have nothing to tremble for, either on the part of your brother or your old friend. The appointment is given for an hour when that place is frequented by a number of persons; and though they may be all bad characters, yet no outrage is ever attempted by a mixed company of that description. As for the man himself, money is his idol; and as he doubtless thinks that he will make a good thing out of me from first to last, he will not kill the goose in the hope of obtaining all the golden eggs at once. To-morrow," continued the Marquis, "Lady Macdonald and Florina will pay you a visit between two and three o'clock. At five my carriage will be here to fetch you both to dine with me at the Manor. I long to introduce you to Lady Everton—to Adolphus—to Elizabeth—and to Frank. Then, soon after eight, you and I, William, will repair to Agar Town. I shall devise some excuse: because no one at the Manor must be made acquainted with the real nature of the business we have in hand, or the place to which we are going. In respect to what concerns yourself and Lady Saxondale, William, we shall know how to act better after this interview with Chiffin to-morrow evening. The greater the mass of evidence we can accumulate against her, the more easily shall we reduce her to terms. My object, as you may now comprehend it, is a double one: namely, to rescue my nephew from her clutches—and likewise to compel her to contradict the foul calumny she has propagated in respect to yourself. We may then leave the vile bad woman to such chastisement as her own utter mortification will be certain to inflict. But as for this nephew of mine," added the Marquis, shaking his head gloomily, "from all I have seen and all I have heard, I deeply fear that he has become inveterate in the ways of vice and demoralization."

"Let us hope for the best, my lord," said Deveril. "You know that so far as I am concerned, I freely forgive him."

"Generous-hearted boy!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean: "I know that you have forgiven him long ago."

"And even if I had not," rejoined our hero, "it would be sufficient to have learnt that he is your lordship's nephew, to induce me to bury the past in oblivion."

The Marquis of Eagledean now rose to take his departure; and the brother and sister accompanied him forth into the little garden in front of the house. There his lordship took leave of Angela, shaking her warmly by the hand; and she retreated into the dwelling—for she perceived that the Marquis desired to say a few words in private with her brother. And it was so: for the nobleman, taking Deveril's arm, led him slowly towards the gate,—saying in a subdued voice, "William, you are now acquainted with all that has taken place between myself and Lady Everton. The world will perhaps look upon her past conduct as frailty and levity—and upon mine as that of a seducer. Now, my dear boy, I have invited yourself and Angela to my house to-morrow: but if you have the slightest hesitation to bring your beautiful sister in contact——"

"My lord, not another word, I beseech you, upon this subject!" interrupted Deveril. "At five o'clock Angela and myself will be prepared to wait upon your lordship, and all those whom we may find beneath your roof."

The Marquis said not another word—but pressed Deveril's hand cordially, and entering his carriage, drove homeward.

CHAPTER XCIV.

LOVE AFFAIRS.

About four o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, Francis Paton might have been seen walking alone in a distant part of the grounds attached to Stamford Manor. He had sought the shadiest spot, not so much because the sun was still powerful—but because he wished to escape the notice of any persons who might be roving about, and likewise to be left in the companionship of his own thoughts. The youth was full of a nervous anxiety: there was a flush upon his cheeks—the glitter of uneasy suspense in his eyes; and from time to time, when his ear caught a sound like that of an approaching footstep, he stopped and flung an eagerly penetrating look through the shrubs and evergreens in the direction of the mansion. Then, as he descried not the person whom he expected, he walked on again, murmuring to himself, "How long the interview lasts!"

Indeed, for an entire hour—since three o'clock—

had Francis Paton been walking to and fro in that shady retreat; and the interval which had elapsed appeared to him at least thrice as long. Twenty times had he looked at his watch — twenty times had he stopped short to glance in the direction of the Manor, and again and again did he murmur, "How long the interview lasts!"

But at length he beheld his sister advancing hastily towards the spot where he was awaiting her arrival; and perceiving that she came quickly, and not with a slow languid pace, his heart bounded with hope: for he thought within himself that she had pleasing tidings to communicate. As she approached nearer still, he saw in her looks sufficient to confirm this anticipation; and flying towards her, he exclaimed, "What news, dear Elizabeth? what does our father say?"

"We have both alike, my dear brother," she responded, "everything to hope."

A cry of joy burst from Frank's lips; and he embraced his sister with the warmest effusion of delight.

"Now tell me," he said, "everything that has taken place"

"Oh, then, dear Frank," she replied archly, and yet with a softly blushing confusion at the same time, "you will now have patience to listen to everything that I may have to say?"

"Yes," he answered; "provided that you have nothing of a disagreeable nature to quantity the joyous intelligence already communicated.

"I do not think you will find it so," she rejoined. "But first, dear Frank, I will speak of your own little love-affair. Come, let me take your arm—and we will walk to and fro beneath this grateful shade. I represented to our father frankly and candidly everything which had taken place between yourself and Miss Juliana Farefield, as you had previously related it all to me——"

"You told his lordship everything?" murmured Frank, half-averting his blushing countenance.

"Oh, yes!—did we not agree, when I undertook to become spokeswoman in the matter, that our father was to be dealt with frankly and unreservedly? Well then, my dear brother, I told him all; and at first he looked very grave and very serious, for more reasons than one——"

"And those reasons?" asked young Paton quickly.

"The first, as he explained them to me," continued Elizabeth, "was because he could not help thinking that it was a mere transient passion on Juliana's part: but yet he admitted that he might be mistaken."

"Oh! yes—he is mistaken!" ejaculated Frank vehemently: "for I know that she loves me; and were it not an egregious vanity on my part to use such terms, I should say that she loves me devotedly—adoringly!"

"So much the better, Frank—inasmuch as you, my dear brother, are so deeply enamoured of her. That however was one reason which made the Marquis look grave. The second is, because he has no reason to entertain any good feeling towards Juliana's mother, Lady Saxondale. On the contrary, there are certain circumstances, which he partly explained to me, and which have not only brought him already in collision with her, but now threaten to make a still wider breach between them. These circumstances relate to his nephew, Lord Harold—and to Mr. William Deveril, whom you have often seen, and who is coming to dine here to-day."

"But no matter for the circumstances, my dear sister," exclaimed Frank impatiently, "so long as our father has not placed his negative——"

"No, my dear brother—I have already assured you to the contrary. Now listen to what the Marquis says. He himself has experienced too bitterly the fatal effects of thwarting the heart's affections, to entertain the slightest idea of attempting a similar coercion with either of his children. No, no—he will not do that——not for worlds would he adopt a course by which he himself and our dear mother were rendered such cruel sufferers. He would rather strain many a point—rather make much sacrifice of feeling as a parent, than practise such tyranny such cruelty. This therefore does he propose—that you shall put Juliana Farefield's love to the test: he himself will suggest the means, and sketch forth the plan to be adopted; and in three or four days shall you repair into Lincolnshire for the purpose."

"Oh, that condition I cheerfully accept!" exclaimed Frank; "and I feel deeply grateful to our father—deeply grateful to you also, my dearest sister——"

"No gratitude to me, Frank," interrupted Elizabeth. "Heaven grant that the result of the test, whatsoever it may be, shall prove in accordance with your hopes and aspirations! The reason that made me so long ere I rejoined you here, was because our father—after he had heard all that I had to say, both on your account and my own—proceeded to the drawing-room to consult our mother. Ah! you may suppose that during the twenty minutes I was left alone in the library, I endured some degree of suspense both for your sake and mine. And yet hope preponderated above fear: for the Marquis had listened to me with so much benevolence—with so much paternal kindness—he had encouraged me in such gentle and soothing terms to proceed each time I hesitated——in short, I saw full well that he would do all in his power to minister unto our happiness."

"And you were not mistaken, Elizabeth?" exclaimed Frank. "But in reference to yourself——"

"Our father will grant Don Diego Christoval an interview the day after to-morrow," answered Miss Paton, the rich blood again mantling upon her cheeks; "and I do not think there is any reason to apprehend an unsatisfactory termination to that meeting. To-morrow evening, you know, dear Frank," continued Elizabeth, speaking more seriously, "the hands of our father and mother will be united in the holy bond of marriage. The special license is already procured—the various arrangements are made. But these indeed are few, inasmuch as the ceremony will take place with the utmost privacy. Perhaps this marriage may be followed shortly by several others——"

"Oh!" cried Frank, in the sanguine enthusiasm of youthful years, "how delightful would it be if Adolphus and Henrietta—yourself and the Count—and, and——"

"Speak it out, my dear brother," said Elizabeth, with a smile upon her lips and a blush upon her cheeks: "Juliana and yourself——if we were all to be married on the same day——Well, we shall see."

"And now, dear sister, that you have at length learned what love is," continued Frank, "tell me, does it not constitute a new existence? is it not a paradise in itself? does it not seem to transport one, as it were, into another state of being? Oh, you who but so short a time back were almost boasting that your heart was inaccessible to love——why, I do really believe that all along, from the very first moment you ever beheld your handsome Christoval in the Catalonian hills, you really loved him: that is to say, the germs of love were engendered in your heart—but the circumstances not being congenial for their expansion and growth, they remained as it were latent, unknown, unsuspected—but not the less surely implanted there; and it only required a change of circumstances, such as those under which you and Don Diego recently met, to evoke these germs of love into active vitality and a recognised existence."

"There may be some truth in what you say, Frank," observed Elizabeth, in a subdued voice: "yes—there may be!"—and for a few moments she reflected profoundly upon the idea which he had suggested: then, suddenly raising her magnificent dark eyes which had been bent downward, she exclaimed with her wonted blitheness, "Come, Frank, we must hasten and dress for dinner. The Deverils and the Leydens are coming—and it will be a happy party."

The brother and sister sped back to the mansion; and it was indeed a happy party which was gathered in the splendid drawing-room at about six o'clock. William Deveril, who had seen Frank in his page's livery at Saxondale House, could not help thinking that handsome as he had looked *then*, he appeared to far greater advantage in his present elegant evening costume; and he shook hands with him in a manner so ingenuously cordial and warm, that it was as much as to imply the words, "We are bosom friends from this moment."

Angela,—who, in a plain white dress, looked ravishingly beautiful,—was heartily welcomed by Lady Everton; and she was soon on the most friendly terms with Elizabeth Paton and Henrietta Leyden. And here we may observe that it would have been difficult, if all England were searched through, to discover three more perfect specimens of female loveliness than Elizabeth, Angela, and Henrietta—or two handsomer youths than William Deveril and Francis Paton. But Adolphus—did he not also appear to advantage? Yes: and wonderfully improved was he alike in personal appearance and the tone of his intellect. Mrs. Leyden and little Charley were amongst the guests; and the sweet boy was full of the most joyous spirits. Altogether, we repeat, it was indeed a happy party.

Soon after eight o'clock the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril entered the carriage, which was in readiness, and which drove away in the direction of Agar Town.

"And so Florina and Angela at once became as affectionate as two sisters," observed the Marquis, referring to some conversation which had already taken place between himself and William Deveril in the course of the evening.

"Angela was delighted with Florina," answered our hero: "indeed, how could she be otherwise? for the heart which is all amiable and pure, is certain to love a being who is herself amiability and purity."

"No doubt of it," said the Marquis. "I was convinced they would immediately experience a fondness for one another. Florina was already much prepossessed in favour of your sister, and of course Angela was equally prepared to love the object of your affection. But Lady Macdonald—what think you of her?"

"Her ladyship was most amiable," replied William. "Altogether, both Angela and myself had every cause to be pleased and flattered by the visit. We are to dine in Cavendish Square the day after to-morrow."

"I know it: for we are to be there to meet you," replied his lordship. "Lady Everton will in the meanwhile have become Marchioness of Eagledean. Elizabeth and Adolphus will also be of the party."

"And Frank—your amiable son Frank?" asked William.

"He is going upon a journey, of which I will tell you more particulars another time. By the bye, I thought I had something to communicate, which perhaps is of more or less consequence: but whether it will prove so, we shall see. That woman whom you rescued from drowning, and who is to call at your residence in the evening of the 21st of this month, at nine o'clock——is it not so?"

"Yes, my lord: it was in the evening of the 21st of July that she gave the appointment that day month, hour for hour——Oh! I have not forgotten it: and often and often do I ask myself what secret she may have to reveal? or whether it were not all the outpouring of a half-crazed brain?"

"No—I do not think so," interrupted the Marquis. "From the particulars you narrated to me, I am inclined to anticipate that she will really have something of importance to communicate. But I was about to tell you something more concerning her. It happened that this afternoon my daughter Elizabeth had a conversation with me on certain matters regarding Frank, and in the course of what took place, she mentioned several little things which had occurred at Saxondale House during the last few weeks of his residence there. Amongst those occurrences, were certain visits, paid under very mysterious circumstances to Lady Saxondale, by a woman precisely answering the description of that same person whom you rescued from the River Trent."

"Ah! then doubtless she was on her way at the time to pay a visit to the Castle," exclaimed William Deveril. "I recollect that she spoke a great deal of Lady Saxondale. How peremptorily she demanded what I was doing in that neighbourhood! and how strangely she told me that if I myself had been to the Castle, it was somewhat important she should know it! I remember also that when I told her I had never set foot in Saxondale Castle in my life, she gave vent to such singular ejaculations, and looked at me with an expression of countenance that I never can forget. I besought her to explain herself: I told her that she was torturing me cruelly—that by her looks and her language she was piling up mystery upon mystery: and yet she would not relieve me from suspense. But this was not all. When I spoke of those overtures which Lady Sax-

ondale had made to me, she adjured me in the most solemn manner to tell her the truth—whether I had really rejected them? Then how suddenly satisfied and even pleased did she seem when I gave her a positive answer!"

"It is strange—most strange," said the Marquis of Eagledean, in a musing tone. "No conjecture can possibly penetrate that woman's meaning, or fathom the mystery. But still those visits which she paid to Saxondale House—for there can be no mistake as to the identity of the woman whom Frank saw, with that of the woman of whom you are speaking,—those visits, I say, would seem to show that she has some intimate knowledge of Lady Saxondale's affairs; and hence her perseverance in questioning you. Yes, William—there is evidently some profound and important secret which your poor father vainly endeavoured to reveal on his death-bed—which the manager Thompson was likewise acquainted with—and of which this singular woman has some inkling. Well, the 21st is not very far distant now; and then we shall see whether the woman will keep the appointment. I have promised to be with you at the time, my dear William—and I shall not fail. But here we are at the spot where I bade the coachman halt."

CHAPTER XCV.

THE SNARE.

THE carriage had stopped in the same place where the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril had alighted on the former occasion of their visit to Agar Town; and the coachman being ordered to wait their return, they proceeded towards Solomon Patch's boozing-ken. On reaching the entrance of that establishment, the uproarious sounds of mirth and revelry rang forth even louder than usual; and on crossing the threshold, the visitors perceived the landlord and his better half serving malt and spirituous liquor to the ill-looking persons gathered about the bar. It was from the taproom that the din of voices emanated; and the whole conversation of the revellers there appeared to be made up of oaths, obscenities, slang songs, and ribald jests.

The moment the Marquis and William Deveril made their appearance, Solomon Patch, evidently prepared for their arrival, stepped forward to receive them with his usual cringing servility, and inducted them into the little parlour behind the bar. He officiously handed them chairs; and bustling about, drew a bottle of wine and put some glasses on the table, before they had leisure to utter a word, much less give a specific order for any refreshment, even if they had required it.

"Is a certain person here?" asked the nobleman, with a significant look at Solomon Patch.

"Yes, he be, sir," was the reply, "Mr. Chiffin, who is a genelmen of the greatest punctuality, and never keeps nobody waiting for nothing whatsumdever, will show the light of his blessed countenance in less than five minutes."

"You seem to have a great deal of custom here," remarked Lord Eagledean, perceiving that the landlord lingered in the room, and not choosing to be uncivil to him.

"Well, sir, me and my missus is plain simple bodies—say-nothing-to-nobody kind of folks; and as long as we can earn our honest crustesses for tea, dinner, and breakfustesses, we don't grumble. We pays the Queen's taxes as regular as clock-work: but we don't pay no water-rates, cos why there's no water laid on the place. The canal, you see, sir, is so precious handy."

"Very handy, indeed," said the Marquis drily: then, as a sudden reminiscence flashed to his mind, sending a cold shudder through his entire form at the same time, he observed, "By the bye, that dreadful murder which was committed close by here—in the barge, I mean,—has any clue been ever discovered to the perpetrator of the deed?"

"Never, sir, that I've heerd of," replied Solomon Patch, without the slightest change of countenance; although he knew full well that the murderer was beneath his roof at that very moment—and what was more too, that he was deliberately and coolly planning another double murder for the hour that was passing.

At this moment the door opened; and Chiffin the Cannibal made his appearance. He took off his battered old white hat surrounded with the rusty black crape, and made what he intended to be a respectful-looking bow to the two visitors. Solomon Patch glided back into the bar; and Chiffin, closing the door, took a seat opposite to the Marquis and Deveril.

"So you got my note, Mr. Gunthorpe?" he said, with a significant nod, as much as to imply that it was very important business to which it related.

"That is the reason we are here this night, and at this hour," replied the Marquis. "I suppose you have something to communicate concerning Lady——"

"Hush, sir—hush!" said Chiffin, turning round and looking towards the door. "That old Patch and his wife," he continued, in a subdued voice, "have got ears as sharp as their eyes; and I do believe they can see through a brick wall. I wouldn't for the world have them know what you've come here about: they would fasten themselves upon me till they got out of me every farthing of the couple of hundred guineas you're going to give me."

"Humph!" said the Marquis drily: "you have fixed your price beforehand?"

"Rather so," responded Chiffin, with a cunning leer; "because I know the value of the information I am going to give you. Why, sir, I've got two letters——But I'm blowed if we can talk here," he added, again affecting to look uneasily around. "I know old Sol and his wife are pricking up their ears."

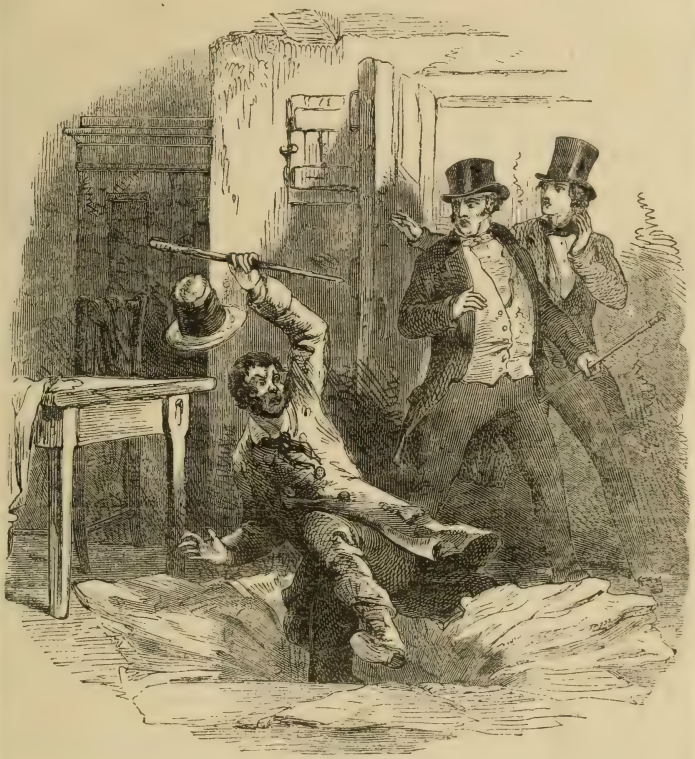
"Then why did you make an appointment for us to meet you here?" demanded Lord Eagledean.

"Cos why I didn't know another crib where two genelmen could meet a chap like me without exciting unpleasant notice. Besides, I live here——"

"Ah! you live here?" said the Marquis.

"Why yes—I've got a room of my own," observed Chiffin; "and a very tidy sitting apartment up-stairs it is too. But come, before we go any farther, is it all right about the blunt?"

"If you mean the money," rejoined the Marquis, "I have enough about me to satisfy your demand. Have you not already had proofs of my liberality? Depend upon it, I will give you a fair price for your letters."



Chiffin reflected for a few moments. He had been driving at a particular object: namely, to get as much as he could out of the two persons before he consigned them to destruction. His rapacity almost prompted him to be more explicit and eager in his demand: but he feared that if he were to display such greediness, a suspicion would be excited in their minds; for they would naturally argue that if he could transact the money-part of the business in the bar-parlour, he could likewise show them the letters in the same place. He accordingly resolved not to risk the two thousand guineas which he was to receive from Lady Saxondale, by any farther angling for the two hundred that he sought to obtain of his intended victims.

"Well then, genelmen," he said, suddenly rising from his seat, "let's to business:"—then pretending to look anxiously over the blind of the window between the parlour and the bar, he again turned towards them, observing in a lower tone, "I knew they were on the watch. Come along with me."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took up a candle; and opening the door, led the way towards the staircase.

"Shall I send the wine and glasses up, Mr. Chiffin?" asked old Solomon, by way of giving a complexion of fairness to the present proceeding.

"Yes, you may as well—and some brandy too, for that matter," responded the Cannibal. "Come along, genelmen—this way."

For a moment William Deveril clutched the arm of the Marquis, and threw upon him a significant look,—not one of actual fear, for our hero was no craven-hearted being—but one full of suspicion as to the integrity of Chiffin's intentions. This removal from one room to another had struck him as being strange. The same idea had occurred to the Marquis himself; and the look which he threw back

upon Deveril, implied the necessity of exercising the utmost caution. But then it simultaneously occurred to them both that as all the lower part of the house was full of people, it was by no means probable that any foul play could be intended them. They accordingly ascended the stairs, Chiffin the Cannibal leading the way with the light in his hand.

That little room which has been so frequently alluded to in former chapters, was reached; and as there seemed to be nothing suspicious there—no place where any murderous confederates of their guide could be concealed in ambush—the Marquis and Deveril did not hesitate to enter it. Still they were on the alert, and kept at a certain distance behind Chiffin, so as to guard against any sudden manifestation of treachery.

"This is my room, genelmen," he said, throwing open that new door which had been constructed; then, as he paused on the threshold, the light which he held in his hand as well as one that was already burning on the table, affording them a full view of the interior, he added, "You see it's no great shakes—only just comfortable; and it's here I'm going to transact my little business in future. Walk in, genelmen—and I will show you these letters at once. We will then settle what they're worth over the lush that old Sol Patch will bring up in a moment."

Despite his villanous-looking countenance, there was a certain degree of frankness and straightforward meaning in this speech of the Cannibal's, which almost completely reassured the Marquis and Deveril. They had moreover looked into the inner room—they saw nothing suspicious—the outer door had been left wide open—and the merest cry would be heard down stairs. Assuredly, then, Chiffin was acting fairly, and there was no perfidy to apprehend!

Deveril was the first to make a movement to follow the Cannibal; for he was resolved that if any traitorous intent should suddenly develop itself, he would be the foremost to bear its brunt, and to the extent of his power shield and protect his benefactor the Marquis of Eagledean. Chiffin, with the candle in one hand and his club in the other, advanced across the room from the new doorway towards the table, which stood against the opposite wall. Deveril had just crossed the threshold—the Marquis was close at hand—when all of a sudden the floor appeared to give way beneath Chiffin's feet, the carpet sinking down at the same time: a horrible yell burst from his lips—the candle and the club fell from his hands—and in the twinkling of an eye he disappeared from the view. But where he had gone down, and the carpet with him, a square chasm remained open in the floor—black and yawning, as if it were the bottomless pit itself!

William Deveril and the Marquis of Eagledean recoiled in dismay from the astounding spectacle. Horror seized upon them with paralyzing effect, rendering them speechless; and there they stood for a few moments, gazing in the stupor of consternation upon the open trap-door through which the Cannibal had disappeared, as if having sold his soul to Satan, his time had come and an abyss had yawned to swallow him up.

Suddenly recovering their presence of mind, the Marquis and Deveril exchanged looks of unutterable horror; and then they turned to flee from a place where such hideous pitfalls appeared to have existence. Be it understood that the candle which remained burning upon the table in the inner room (that which Chiffin had carried being extinguished as it fell) not merely lighted the scene of horror in the immediate vicinage, but also threw its beams into the smaller room where Lord Eagledean and Deveril now were. But on turning towards the outer door, they perceived that it was shut. This had been done by old Solomon Patch, who had stolen up-stairs just at the very time they were following Chiffin into the inner room; and he had shut that outer door to prevent whatsoever cries might be uttered, from reaching the ears of the people down stairs. And here we may at once observe that Chiffin's yell could scarcely have penetrated beyond that door; or if it did, it was drowned in the uproarious din of revelry thundering forth from the tap-room.

The instant that the Marquis and Deveril, on turning round to flee from the place, beheld the outer door closed, they again threw rapid and unutterable looks upon each other—as much as to imply that there was some hideous treachery impending. Our young hero, seizing upon a huge wooden stool, was about to batter down that door,—taking it for granted, in the hurry and excitement of his thoughts, that it was fast secured outside: but it suddenly opened, and a female made her appearance.

"Ah!" he ejaculated, as he recognized the woman whom he had saved from drowning in the Trent: but she placed her finger to her lips, and he uttered not another word.

"Silence!" said Madge Somers—for she it was; "you have nothing to fear:"—and as she spoke, she entered the room, closing the door behind her.

The Marquis of Eagledean, from the description which had been given him of this woman, at once knew who she was; and both he and Deveril perceived by her manner, even before she spoke those reassuring words, that she was friendly disposed towards them.

"Do not excite yourselves—there must be no disturbance," she hastened to observe. "That pitfall was intended for you—yes, both of you—but I have saved you."

With an impulsive feeling of fervid gratitude, which was indeed natural enough under such extraordinary circumstances, Deveril caught the woman by one hand—the Marquis by the other; and those hands were fervidly pressed.

"My good woman," said Lord Eagledean, "we owe you our lives—we understand it all—that miscreant lured us hither to accomplish our destruction—you have saved us—your reward shall be immense——"

"Do not speak so loud," interrupted Madge Somers: and her words were uttered in that peremptory tone of command which she was so accustomed to adopt. "The people below must know nothing of what has happened."

"But it is impossible to pass over the transaction thus!" cried the Marquis. "Such a horribly treacherous contrivance could not exist here without the knowledge of the vile wretches who keep the place. They must be given up to justice."

"Silence, Mr. Gunthorpe—I command you!"

said Madge Somers, planting her right foot foremost and assuming an attitude that was alike one of dominant command and stern menace. "I have saved your lives—you acknowledged but a few moments back how much you were indebted to me. The least you can do to testify your gratitude, is to follow my counsel. I say, therefore, that there must be secrecy upon this subject: not a single syllable respecting the transaction of this night must pass the lips of either of you! I have saved your lives, I repeat: would you endanger mine? And what would my life be worth, if you blazoned all this forth to the world? Patch and his wife might go to the gallows: but would the law do nothing to *me*? Though Chiffin was a villain—a robber—a murderer ——aye, you may start: he *was* a murderer—and he would have been a murderer again to-night if it had not been for me! But though he was all this, yet I had no right to murder *him*—which I have done to save *you both*. The law might not hang me, considering the circumstances: but it would transport me; and a sentence of transportation would be death, because I would commit suicide! Even if I were pardoned, my life would not be worth a month's purchase. Chiffin has friends—the Patches have friends—and I should be waylaid—I should be assassinated by the sharp knife of vengeance. Now do you understand me, Mr. Gunthorpe? do you understand me, William Deveril? In a word, I have saved *your* lives: do you wish to take *mine*?"

Both the Marquis of Eagledean and our young hero recognized the stern truth of all the arguments which Madge Somers advanced; and though they experienced an indescribable repugnance to throw the veil of darkness over this terrible proceeding, yet on the other hand they dared not perpetrate such monstrous ingratitude as to endanger the life of the woman who had saved theirs.

"You will follow my counsel?" repeated Madge Somers, her naturally harsh and forbidding countenance looking terrible in the present resoluteness of its expression: indeed there appeared to be an iron firmness about this woman—an even more than masculine decision of purpose, which had the effect of overawing the strongest and proudest minds.

"We will do nothing to hurt you," said the Marquis of Eagledean: "no—not for worlds would we be guilty of ingratitude!"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated William Deveril."

"It is well," observed Madge Somers: "I believe you—I put faith in you both; and therefore I exact not any solemn pledge or vow. In a few instants you shall depart. But stay—let us assure ourselves that the miscreant has met his righteous doom."

Thus speaking, Madge Somers passed into the inner room; and making a slight circuit, so as to avoid the gaping chasm, she took up the candle from the table: then advancing to the very edge of the abyss, she stooped over, holding the candle above her head so as to obtain a greater benefit from the light.

"All dark—as dark as pitch," she muttered: "a thousand candles would not throw a single beam down to the bottom:"—then she paused and listened for nearly a minute. "All is still too—as still as death," she said, turning away from the chasm, over which she had bent so far and so fearlessly that both Deveril and the Marquis shuddered lest she should lose her balance and tumble in.

It was therefore quite a relief to them both—and they breathed freely once more—when she moved away from the edge of the pitfall.

"Now, my good woman," said the Marquis, "heaven knows that we shall be full well pleased to escape from this den of horrors: but in the first place I wish to ask you one or two questions—and in the second place you must allow me to give you such reward as what I have about me will enable me to offer."

"The questions first. Go on," said Madge, curtly and peremptorily.

"Know you at whose instigation that miscreant"—and the Marquis of Eagledean pointed towards the dark yawning gulf—"sought our lives?"

"Perhaps I do," answered Madge: "but the time is not come to satisfy you on this point. In short, I cannot be questioned now: I will not be! On the 21st of this month—and it is not many days hence—I have an appointment to keep; and it shall be kept. Therefore say not another word: you must depart—and I also am in a hurry to be gone."

"Here, my good woman—here!" said the Marquis, forcing upon her a purse well crammed with bank-notes at one end and with gold at the other. "Take this—take this. I shall see you again on the 21st, and will give you more."

But Madge Somers hesitated to accept the nobleman's bounty; and therefore have we used the term that it was *forced* upon her. What strange feeling was it—or what idiosyncracy—that made this woman hesitate to receive that purse?—she who was penniless at the moment—she who was ever ready to clutch greedily at the means of gratifying her infatuation for the gaming-table—she who throughout a long series of years had existed upon the proceeds of crime, robbery, and extortion—she who in a word had never scrupled at any deed of turpitude to obtain gold,—how was it that *she* hesitated? Ah! there was some strange thought uppermost in her mind—some remorseful sentiment—some compunctious feeling: for there are moments in the lives of even the vilest and the worst of human creatures, when the heart is thus touched and the soul thus moved. Such are the inscrutable dispensations of heaven! such the mysteries of the character of mankind! And this woman, whose soul was saturated with vice—tanned, hardened, iron-bound, petrified, steeled, by a long career of guilt and enormity—this woman whose life had been dragged through all the moral sinks, cesspools, heaps of feculence, sloughs of mire, bogs, morasses, and accumulated abominations which abound in this great metropolis of our's,—this woman it was that now hesitated to accept that purse! Strange indeed was her look as she fixed her eyes upon William Deveril, and then reverted them upon the countenance of the Marquis.

"Yes, yes," said the nobleman; "you must take that money: and I will give you more—much more the next time we meet."

Madge Somers weighed the purse in her hand—then opened it—drew forth a single gold piece—still clutched it—still hesitated—and at length all in a moment thrust it back upon the Marquis,

saying in her habitually curt manner, "No, Mr. Gunthorpe, I will not take it. And now begone, both of you—begone, I say! But once more beware how you breathe a single word of aught that has taken place here to-night. Begone!"—and she extended her arm in a commanding manner towards the outer door.

"But my good woman," said William Deveril, "we cannot leave you thus. You have saved our lives—you must accept a reward."

"No—nothing more than what I have taken:"—and she displayed the piece of gold. "Why should you throw temptation in my way?" she demanded, almost fiercely. "Do you know what I should do if I were possessed of that money? I should speed with it to the gambling table——Ah! you may both look startled, and shocked, and astonished—but it is the truth! And were I to hasten thither, I should be neglecting a duty which I owe to *you*, William Deveril. And now, not another word—depart—begone!"

Lord Eagledean and our young hero, astonished at what they heard—astonished likewise at the singular character and conduct of this unaccountable woman, hesitated no longer to obey her; but issued from the room. The staircase was quite dark—but they groped their way down it; and the moment they appeared in front of the bar, both Solomon Patch and his wife were seized with a ghastly terror. Neither the Marquis nor William Deveril tarried to speak a word: they merely threw a look of mingled indignation and loathing upon the two wretches, and issued from that den of infamy and horror.

The moment they had disappeared from the view of Solomon Patch and his wife, these two exchanged deeply significant looks, in which suspense, consternation, and bewilderment were all blended. Then the man in a hurried whisper bade his wife compose her looks and go on serving the customers, while he sped up-stairs to learn what had taken place: for neither he nor Mrs. Patch could possibly conceive by what means the two visitors had come off in safety. Had the plot failed? were they gone to give information to the authorities? or had Chiffin concluded a better money-bargain than that which had originally instigated him to the concoction of the snare?

Speeding up the staircase, three steps at a time, Solomon Patch found Madge Somers bending over the open trap-door. But where was Chiffin? The look which the old landlord flung hastily around, encountered not the form of the Cannibal.

"Ah! is that you?" said Madge.

"Yes. But where is Chiffin?"

"There!"—and she pointed down into the pit.

"There?" echoed Solomon: and starting back, he gazed in bewilderment upon the woman.

"Yes—there!" she answered coldly. "Chiffin was caught in his own trap. It gave way as he was passing over it."

"Ah!" cried Solomon, not for an instant doubting the truth of this explanation, which indeed appeared so rational and so feasible.

"He is done for," said Madge, still bending over the abyss. "There is not a splash in the water—there is not a movement—there is not the slightest sound of a struggle. Nor was there from the very first."

"Well," mused Solomon Patch, in an audible tone—though not exactly intending to address his observations to Madge Somers,—"I don't know, arter all, that it's such a very bad job. Chiffin was getting a regular devil: he had got us all under his thumb—we didn't dare say as how our souls was our own—and as for peaching agin him, that was out of the question; cos why he knowed too much of *us* for us to tell what we knowed of *him*. So, arter all, perhaps it's for the best. It's a hill vind that blows no good to nobody."

"You are not altogether wrong, Sol," replied Madge Somers, well pleased in her heart to find that the old landlord took the occurrence in this philosophic light. "But I say, we had better pull this trap up; and then it would be as well just to go and cover the mouth of the well with the big stones, for fear of an accident happening to anybody else."

"Yes, yes—have it all your own way, Madge," ejaculated Solomon. "But them two genelmen——"

"You have nothing to fear. I pitched them a beautiful tale, that has made them quite comfortable. Hold your tongue about what has taken place—and don't for the world let any of the pals know what has happened to Chiffin. In a few days, when they miss him, you can say that he's wanted on account of that affair in the barge, and that he's keeping himself scarce."

"All right, Madge," rejoined Solomon, from whose mind an immense weight had been lifted by the assurance that the two visitors were not going to adopt any ulterior measures that might draw down the vengeance of the law upon himself and his establishment. "But how about raising this here trap-door?"

"There's a bit of string to lift it," said Madge; "and the bolt will hold it fast. But it won't do to walk over it," she continued, by way of giving a colour to the tale she had already told; "for fear it should yield as it did under Chiffin's feet."

As she thus spoke, she stooped down—seized hold of the cord—and drew up the trap-door, which, catching with a spring-bolt, remained fixed in its setting. She then took the light from the table, and descended the stairs, accompanied by Solomon Patch. They passed into the scullery together, closing the door behind them; and there, bending over the brink of the well, Madge listened once more with suspended breath. She likewise endeavoured to throw the light of the candle down into the black depth—but without success: the inky darkness absorbed the feeble glimmerings of that light.

"All still!" she said to the landlord. "What's the depth of that well?"

"About twenty feet," he replied.

"And the depth of the water?"

"When Chiffin measured it with plummet and cord t'other day, there was about six feet of water."

"Ah! then he was drowned in no time," observed Madge: and placing the candle upon the ground, she said, "Now let's put some of these big stone over the mouth."

Solomon Patch aided her in the task, which was soon accomplished; and the opening was completely closed by the flags which they placed upon it.

"Now, the best thing you can do," said Madge

Somers, "is to get a carpenter to put your house to rights again, and secure that trap-door: for if you or your wife happen to walk in your sleep, it will be rather an unpleasant business."

Having thus spoken, the woman took her departure from the boozing-ken, the landlord of which returned to his wife in the bar, to take the first opportunity of giving her an account of all that had occurred.

CHAPTER XCVI.

THE ENAMOURED SQUIRE.

We must now return to Saxondale Castle. Three weeks had elapsed since the accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's spirited steed which had happened to Lord Harold Staunton. He had remained confined to his room for several days, at the termination of which he announced himself as being perfectly restored to health and strength; and though he had since frequently complained of pains in the back and limbs, yet it was sufficiently evident that no serious consequences were to be apprehended. He continued to reside at the Castle, notwithstanding his aunt and sister had taken their departure; and it began to be whispered amongst the domestics that he was to marry Lady Saxondale. It was known that the contemplated alliance between Lord Saxondale and Lady Florina Staunton had been suddenly broken off, and that Edmund had accompanied his guardian Lord Petersfield on the special mission with which that nobleman was charged to the Imperial Court of Vienna.

Meanwhile Squire Hawkshaw had continued unremitting in his attentions to Juliana Farefield,—not only unremitting, but, if possible, doubling them. He was completely infatuated with that superb creature; and she took good care to retain him captive in the snares wherewith she had caught him. He was a constant visitor at the Castle, and every day was seen walking or riding out with Juliana. Still he had not as yet formally proposed for her hand. Be it remembered that he had firmly resolved to allow at least a month to elapse from the night of the ball at the Denisons' ere he confessed his passion and proffered his suit. It had cost him many an effort to keep back the tender avowal: but he had succeeded in doing so, under the impression that it would not be delicate or proper to manifest precipitation in such a case. The month however had now drawn to a close. It was in the middle of July when the Denisons' ball took place: it was now the middle of August—and Mr. Hawkshaw hailed with delight the termination of the interval which he had imposed upon himself as a period of preliminary wooing.

But did Juliana ever think of Francis Paton? Yes: she was constantly devouring him, as it were, with all the intense fervour of her sensuous nature. The image of that beautiful youth was always uppermost in her mind; and when alone she revolved a thousand schemes for the gratification of her passion after the ceremony of marriage with Mr. Hawkshaw should have furnished a cloak for her proceedings. She determined, as soon as convenient and practicable after the nuptial ceremony, to adopt some measures to bring Francis into the neighbourhood. Might she not manage to introduce him as a page into Hawkshaw Hall, when she should become the mistress of that establishment? or might she not secrete him at some humble but respectable dwelling in the neighbourhood, so that she might see him frequently and under circumstances of proper precaution? She did not entertain the slightest feeling of affection for Mr. Hawkshaw: she only received his addresses and purposed to accept him as a husband to suit her own selfish views. She wanted an established position — she wanted to separate from a mother whom she regarded with mistrust, aversion, and every feeling that was different from respect and veneration — she wanted also the means and opportunity of indulging her licentious passion for young Paton. But did she therefore love Frank in reality? The feeling she experienced for him she regarded as love—but it would be desecrating that pure and hallowed sentiment to affirm that it *was* a true and genuine love which fanned those devouring fires in the heart of Juliana Farefield. It was a fervid passion—but not a real love: it was a feeling of the sense, and not a sentiment: it fed upon the gross aliment of hot desire, and not upon the sweet manna of chaste and hallowed reflections. Had she really loved him in the true meaning of the term, she would have flown in the face of the world to become his wife, even while he was the humble and obscure page—she would have set at defiance all the conventionalisms of society in order to ensure her own happiness and prove her devoted affection for its object. Therefore it was not a genuine sentiment which Juliana experienced towards Francis Paton—but a passion consisting only of a gross sensuality.

The time having now come, as we have above stated, for Mr. Hawkshaw to make a formal offer of his hand to Juliana, he resolved to avail himself of the first opportunity. This was easily found: for Juliana was enabled to be as much alone with him and as often as she thought fit. Lady Saxondale interfered not with her: while she on the other hand interfered not with her mother and Lord Harold Staunton.

It was a gorgeous morning in the middle of August,—the sun pouring its flood of unclouded effulgence upon the old castle, the river, and the surrounding scenery,—when Mr. Hawkshaw conducted Juliana forth at about eleven o'clock to walk in the garden. She had thrown on a simple straw bonnet, with a light scarf over her shoulders; and she looked most enchantingly handsome. With all the natural keenness of her penetration, she had at once discovered by Mr. Hawkshaw's manner that the wished-for moment was now at hand. The flush of anticipated success and triumph was upon her cheeks, mantling richly through the delicate olive of her complexion; and the light of joy danced in her magnificent dark eyes, brighter than if it were the sun's beams that were reflecting there. Her hair for the morning-toilet was arranged in massive bands; and though she and her admirer sought the shadiest avenue in the garden, yet was the entire atmosphere so permeated with the gorgeous sunlight, that the luxuriant masses of that raven hair shone with the richest gloss. There was a dewy moisture too upon her lips, which made them look redder than any one of the blushing roses which

embowered the path sought by herself and her admirer—and riper than any luscious fruit that hung to the garden-trees. Though the morning-dress that she wore ascended to the throat, thus concealing the grand contours of her bust, yet was the swell of her bosom indicated by the rising and falling of the *corsage* of that white drapery; and its heavings could be felt by her companion's arm as she leant upon it. Her looks — her air — her demeanour — her brilliant beauty,—everything about her, is fine, was but too well calculated to rivet the chains which she had forged around the heart of George Hawkshaw; and if he had ever hesitated to propose himself as her husband,—which assuredly he had not,—he could no longer have possibly hesitated now.

"Miss Farefield," he said, after the exchange of some casual and indifferent observations, "I have made up my mind——I have determined——to—to speak to you this morning on a subject closely regarding my happiness——"

"Indeed, Mr. Hawkshaw?" she observed murmuringly, at the same time affecting the most delicious confusion.

"Yes, Miss Farefield——Juliana——dear Juliana!" he exclaimed, gazing upon her in rapture: "can you not comprehend me? I am not a man accustomed to make flattering speeches — I am frank-hearted and ingenuous——such I believe is my nature——but if you will accept the hand, as you already possess the love, of one who will make your happiness the study of his life, that individual now kneels at your feet!"

And suiting the action to the word, George Hawkshaw did fall upon one knee; and taking the lady's hand, he pressed it to his lips. She murmured some words which were half choked by the enthusiastic feelings of triumph and success which agitated in her bosom, and which the unsophisticated admirer attributed to a maidenly confusion. Encouraged and delighted by those few murmuring words, and by the manner in which they were uttered, he started up from his knee—and gazing with renewed rapture upon her downcast blushing countenance, he said, "Tell me, Juliana—tell me—will you be mine?"

"I will," she responded, still faintly and tremulously; and Hawkshaw, flinging his arms around her, strained her superb form to his breast at the same time covering her warm glowing cheeks with fervid caresses.

"You will be mine?" he said in exultant tones: "this is the fulfilment of the dearest hope I ever cherished in my life! O Juliana, you cannot conceive the joy that you have poured into my heart! And let me tell you that it is the heart of an honest man which you possess—a heart that never loved before —a heart that is your's, and your's only. Give me your arm, dear Juliana—and let us walk here together for a little while. I feel that I could become eloquent to a degree in promising all that I will do to ensure your happiness; and I am confident that you will reciprocate this strenuous endeavour on my part. We are not mere children, Juliana—we understand our own feelings—and what we promise we know that we shall perform. On my side there is the fullest confidence that I shall be happy with you: tell me, dear Juliana, that you feel an equally strong conviction of being happy with me?"

For a moment Miss Farefield's heart was smitten with remorse at the idea of the basely treacherous part which she was playing towards a man who addressed her in such honest terms and in such noble language. But that compunctious feeling quickly passed away—her selfishness became paramount once more—and the words to which she gave utterance, were spoken with every appearance of a congenial frankness and candour.

"My dear George, I have loved you from the first moment we met at Mr. Denison's. Perhaps I may even admit that on former occasions when in Lincolnshire, I did not behold you with indifference——"

"Oh, Juliana! is this possible? may I flatter myself that it is so?"—and the confiding noble-hearted Hawkshaw again spoke with exultant enthusiasm.

"It is true, dear George—it is true—most true," murmured the artful Juliana, appearing to be plunged into the modest confusion of a maiden from whose lips an avowal of the heart's feelings is elicited by the influence of sincerest love.

Mr. Hawkshaw was overjoyed by that assurance, which he firmly believed: for what will not a man believe when he is lip-deep in love, and when the things which he is called upon thus to put faith in, are so intimately connected with that love of his? He and Juliana continued to walk together for three whole hours, until the bell rang for luncheon. Those were three hours of elysian bliss to the fine-hearted Squire; and they afforded Juliana an opportunity for setting to work all the tactics of the most delicate *finesse*. She had not only won the love of the Squire—but also his implicit confidence. It was her purpose to retain both, though all the while resolving to deceive him. She had to affect a passion which she did not feel: but this she did the more easily, because while responding to her admirer in the language of love, she pictured to herself that it was Frank Paton to whom she was speaking. Thus substituting the image of Frank in its youthful, delicate, and almost effeminate beauty, for the image of George Hawkshaw in its fine handsome manliness, she contrived to speak more from the heart than she would otherwise have been enabled to do. And when Hawkshaw's arm encircled her waist, she tutored her fancy to believe that it was young Paton's; and she felt a thrill of sensuous ecstacy sweep fervid and glowing through her entire form. And when too Mr. Hawkshaw pressed his lips to her's, it was still in imagination young Frank's mouth that thus grew to her own; and as the boiling blood ran like lightning through her veins, the effect was to impart a more rapturous fervour to her kisses.

At length the summons for luncheon, ringing forth from the belfry over the entrance-tower, sprinkled the hot stagnant air with its metallic sounds; and Mr. Hawkshaw led back his intended into the Castle. After the repast the Squire requested a private interview with Lady Saxondale—which was of course immediately accorded: for her ladyship had received a rapidly whispered hint from Juliana to the effect that she had received an offer of Mr. Hawkshaw's hand. Lady Saxondale led the way to the library; and there, without much circumlocution, the Squire informed her of the step he had taken, and requested her assent to the match.

Lady Saxondale, playing the maternal part to perfection, represented how dear to her was the welfare of her elder daughter — how jealously she had watched over that beloved child's happiness—how pleased and gratified she was to think that her darling Juliana had won the esteem and affection of so worthy a gentleman as Mr. Hawkshaw—and how cheerfully she (Lady Saxondale) gave her consent to the alliance.

The speech was altogether a very beautiful one, eminently touching and pathetic: the only misfortune was the utter hollowness of the sentiments themselves and the guileful hypocrisy of the lips from which they came. However, Mr. Hawkshaw regarded it as a genuine outpouring of maternal love and affection; and taking her ladyship's hand, he pressed it to his lips in token of gratitude for her kindness in consenting to part with such a matchless treasure as her daughter Juliana.

"I avail myself of this opportunity, Mr. Hawkshaw," said Lady Saxondale, "to make you in return a certain communication—which indeed I am bound to make, now that you will so soon become one of the family. You must have perceived that Lord Harold Staunton entertains a most affectionate regard towards me; and I do not know that there is any indiscretion in avowing that I reciprocate his love. He has offered me his hand. I have spoken to him most seriously on the subject. I have bade him remember that there is a considerable disparity in our years; and I have besought him to study his heart well ere receiving an affirmative answer from my lips. He has replied with all suitable frankness and candour. In a word, therefore, I propose to consult my own happiness by accompanying Lord Harold Staunton to the altar."

"I congratulate your ladyship," answered Mr. Hawkshaw, "upon a prospect which, from all that you have said, is so well calculated to consolidate your happiness. From what I have seen of Lord Harold, I have every reason to admire and like him. But when once you have obtained the influence of a wife over his lordship," added the Squire, with a good-natured smile, "I hope you will prevent him from mounting strange horses and taking daring leaps."

"Depend upon it, my dear Mr. Hawkshaw," answered Lady Saxondale, while a blush rose to her cheeks; "that I value his life too much to permit him to risk it again in so venturesome a manner."

The Squire took leave of her ladyship, and then proceeded to bid farewell to Juliana also: for he had some important business to transact at Gainsborough that afternoon, and had ordered the groom at the Castle to have his horse in readiness at three o'clock. It was now close upon that hour; and therefore the Squire could no longer delay taking his departure. He found Juliana alone in the drawing-room; and when he had bade her a temporary farewell—only until the morrow—he inquired where Lord Harold was? She answered that she thought he had ascended to his own chamber.

"I will just seek him there, to shake him by the hand," observed the good-hearted Squire: "for as we are both to enter the family soon," he added with a smile, "we must maintain all friendly courtesies. Besides, under existing circumstances, it is but right I should acquaint him with what has taken place between you and me to-day—and also congratulate him on the change which his position is likewise to experience. One kiss more, dear Juliana—and I am off."

The kiss was given and returned; and Squire Hawkshaw, quitting the drawing-room, repaired to Lord Harold Staunton's chamber, which was on a higher storey and in a remote part of the building. On knocking at the door, he was desired to enter; and he found the young nobleman making some change in his toilet. He proceeded to mention his engagement with Juliana, and likewise to offer suitable congratulations on Harold's intended marriage with Lady Saxondale. It struck him for the moment that a somewhat strange expression passed over the exceedingly handsome countenance of Lord Harold,—an expression which seemed to spring from the writhing sense of internal pain: but as it immediately passed away, and Staunton recovered his wonted cheerfulness of look as he reciprocated those congratulations, the Squire thought no more of the circumstance: or if he did, he attributed it to the lingering effects of the severe fall from the horse.

"Why are you going so early to-day, Hawkshaw?" asked Lord Harold.

"I have some little business at Gainsborough," responded the Squire. "In fact, a large farmer, who owes me some money, has called a meeting of his creditors at a tavern there: and as he is a worthy good fellow, I am going to give him what help I can."

"You are going to ride across?" asked Harold.

"Yes: and on that same thorough-bred, too, that you were so venturesome with. I am afraid that you sometimes feel the pain now? And yet let me see—it must be a good three weeks ago——"

"Ah! but it was a very serious fall," rejoined Harold. "I am going to have two or three hours' fishing, under the shade of those trees yonder, till dinner-time."

"You seem to be fond of manly sports," observed Hawkshaw. "Ah! you have got a pistol-case here:" —and the Squire, who possessed a perfect knowledge of every description of fire-arms, opened the box. "Double barrelled, eh?" he said, taking up the only one it contained; for the other was not there, although the case was formed to contain two. "This is a beautiful pistol—and an excellent maker's name too—one of the first in London."

"Yes: they are first-rate pistols," observed Staunton, turning aside to put on a shooting-jacket in which he was going on his fishing expedition.

"Where is the other pistol?" asked the Squire: "there ought to be a pair—it would be a great pity to lose one. Besides, one of these days you and I will have a shooting match. I will order my groom to bring over some pigeons from the Hall——But where is the other pistol?" he again asked.

"Oh! I left it behind in London," responded Staunton, now bending over a long wooden case which contained some fishing apparatus for which he had sent a few days previously from Gainsborough.

"Oh! no matter," said the Squire. "I have got a splendid collection of fire-arms; and when we do have our match, I will bring over a couple of rifles, which will be better than pistols. Are you a good shot, Staunton?——I mean with pistols."

"I—I—am considered to be so. But confound this fishing rod! there is something wrong with it."

"Let me see," said the Squire, hastening forward to render his assistance. "I know all about fishing-tackle; and if I had known you wanted it, could have lent you a better gear than that——But, good heavens! my dear fellow, what is the matter with you?"—for Lord Harold's countenance was as white as a sheet; and upon it was an expression of indescribable anguish, blended even with horror.

"Nothing, nothing—only those pains," was the quick and somewhat excited response.

"Ah!" rejoined the good-hearted Squire, "you must really take care of yourself, Staunton. You were perhaps more shaken than any of us fancied at the time. But let us look at this rod. There! —now it is all right; and I must be off—for it's past three o'clock. Do take care of yourself. Not too much exertion, mind!—for these sprains, and aches, and twinges do hang uncommonly about one."

With these words, Mr. Hawkshaw shook Lord Harold cordially by the hand, and then hurried from the chamber. Having threaded the long corridor towards the staircase, he rapidly descended the flight—reached the hall—and issuing forth, mounted his spirited steed, which was in readiness. Putting a crown-piece into the hand of the groom —for the Squire was generosity itself—he gallopped away, made the circuit of the grounds, and thus getting on the rear, or northern end of the castle, proceeded along the bank of the river through the fields in the direction of Gainsborough.

He had ridden about a couple of miles; and on reaching a gate, Mr. Hawkshaw was stooping forward to open it, when several horses, that were in the field which he was about to enter, gallopped, as if they were mad, but only in frolicsome sport, across the meadow. The thorough-bred which the Squire bestrode, instantaneously pricked up its ears, manifesting that sudden excitement which spirited horses are wont to do under such circumstances; and swerving abruptly on one side, the animal threw the Squire completely over the gate into the next field. His hat fell off—his head came in violent contact with a stone—and he was completely stunned. In a few minutes he came back to consciousness: and found an exceedingly prepossessing —indeed beautiful youth, bending over him—bathing his face with a wet handkerchief, which had been dipped for the purpose in the river that flowed close by.

"Are you much hurt?" inquired the youth, in a gentle voice, expressive of sincere sympathy and concern.

"No—I think not," said Mr. Hawkshaw: and then making an attempt to rise, he found that he was much better able to do so than might have been expected from the severity of his fall. "Thank God! there are no bones broken at all events. A little pain in the head—but that is of no great consequence. Tell me, my young friend, is there much of a contusion on the forehead?"

"No mark is apparent there at all," replied the youthful stranger: "but I felt a considerable swelling on the side—the hair however covers it."

"So much the better!" ejaculated the Squire, overjoyed at this intelligence. "Nobody need know anything of my misadventure. But where is the horse?"

"He made a long circuit, and then came back. There he is—just behind the hedge. I would have caught the noble animal, but did not like to leave you till I was assured that you were returning to consciousness."

"It would have been more seemly," exclaimed the Squire, "had I expressed my heartfelt thanks first to you, my young friend, before I inquired for my horse:"—and as he thus spoke, Mr. Hawkshaw took the youth's hand and shook it warmly. "Yes, I am indeed most grateful—you have evidently done me no small service. Why, one might have died if left to one's self in such a state—or been kicked to death by those half-wild horses there, that are scampering about—and which, by the bye, were the cause of the accident. But we must know more of each other," continued the Squire: and now that he surveyed the youth more attentively, he observed that he was poorly and indeed shabbily dressed, although his linen was scrupulously clean, and everything about him denoted as much neatness as the threadbare garments would allow their wearer to display.

"I thank you, sir, for your kindness," answered the youth: "but I am a stranger in these parts—my stay here will not be long——"

"Wait a moment!" cried Mr. Hawkshaw: and hastily opening the gate—for he felt but little inconvenience now from his accident—he fetched his horse from where it was browsing on the grass, and led the animal through the gate, which the youth civilly held open for the purpose.

"Now, my young friend," continued Mr. Hawkshaw: "I repeat that we cannot part in this manner. In the first place, let me announce myself. Here is my card: my residence is a few miles distant in that direction. How long are you staying in these parts? where are you at present residing? and will you shift your quarters to the Hall? You shall be as welcome there as if we had known each other for as many years as we have minutes."

"Again do I thank you most sincerely for your kindness," responded the youth: "but I cannot avail myself of it. It were however churlish and rude not to say that on some future occasion, should I revisit Lincolnshire, I shall assuredly do myself the pleasure of calling at Hawkshaw Hall."

"Well, I take *that* as a promise," exclaimed the kind hearted hospitable Squire. "But remember —it must be as faithfully kept as my invitation is sincerely given. And now tell me whose acquaintance it is I have had the pleasure of forming?"

"I have no card with me," replied the youth, "but my name is Paton."

"Then let me henceforth call young Mr. Paton my friend," said Hawkshaw, again grasping Frank's hand. "But come now—don't think me rude—and don't be angry with me for what I am going to say. Is there nothing I can do for you? I have told you that I mean to regard you as a friend; and you must look upon me in the same light. You are very young—and I dare say that you have been brought up in a manner above your present means. Now, don't be offended—for I do not seek to wound your feelings: no, not for the world! Perhaps if you had a good friend—a sincere friend—a friend who would take you by the hand—a friend, in short, who would not let you want for a few hundred pounds to give you a fair start in life——"

Frank's countenance had become the colour of crimson; for he knew that all this was said in consequence of the shabby apparel which he wore. But at the same time he experienced a deep sense of gratitude towards his new friend, whose frank generosity of spirit it was by no means difficult to penetrate.

"To cut all this short," said Mr. Hawkshaw, "will you come and take up your quarters with me at the Hall? It is not very far distant; and if you go to Gainsborough, there is a van leaving at six o'clock that will put you down at the park-gate. Are you staying at Gainsborough?"

"Yes—I am staying there for the present," replied Frank, who did not like to say too much concerning himself; because his business in Lincolnshire was, as the reader may suspect, of rather a secret as well as of a delicate nature.

"And may I ask," pursued Hawkshaw, whether you are rambling here with any fixed purpose, or only through curiosity? Perhaps you were on your way to see that fine old castle yonder? I have just come from thence; it is Lady Saxondale's."

"Yes," observed Frank, with difficulty veiling his confusion at all the various associations conjured up by the mention of that name: "I was going to while away a few hours by looking at the castle. As for your invitation to stay at the Hall, I again express my sincere thanks; and with regard to all the other kind things you said, and the offers you so generously but delicately made——"

"You refuse them?" said Mr. Hawkshaw: and he gazed upon the youth with growing interest as well as curiosity. "Are you alone at Gainsborough? have you parents, relatives, or friends there?"

"No; I came upon a little business of a private nature, which perhaps will not detain me beyond to-morrow. And now, sir, with your permission, I shall bid you farewell."

"And you will suffer me to do nothing for you"?

asked Hawkshaw. "I see that you are a young gentleman in speech—in manners in everything ——But will you be offended if I ask you for your address in Gainsborough, that I may leave there some little token of my gratitude for the service you have rendered me?"

"Again and again do I express my gratitude," responded Frank, "coupled with the assurance that I require nothing. On some future occasion we shall perhaps meet again. And now farewell, sir."

With these words Frank hurried away in the direction of Saxondale Castle, while Mr. Hawkshaw proceeded to mount his horse, saying to himself, "He is a nice youth—a very interesting youth—but somehow or another I can't make him out. I should like to know more of him:"—and he was half inclined to ride back and renew the conversation; but fearing that his good intentions might be interpreted as mere inquisitiveness, or even construed into downright impertinent curiosity, he galloped away towards Gainsborough.

Meanwhile Francis Paton had hurried onward until the sounds of the retreating horse's hoofs no longer reached his ears; and then slackening his pace somewhat, he thought to himself, "This Mr. Hawkshaw is evidently a warm-hearted and excellent man. Had I wanted a friend, accident would have sent me one in him."

But his thoughts were speedily diverted into another channel: for as the reader may full well suppose, it was not to survey the fine old castle that Francis Paton had come down into Lincolnshire—but to obtain an interview with the daughter of its mistress. Trusting to circumstances to furnish him with the desired opportunity, he approached nearer to the grounds; and skirting the park-railing, plunged his looks into the enclosure of the spacious garden within. On reaching a gate, and finding it unlocked, he thought there would at least be no harm in entering the park; and once there, he naturally enough approached the garden all the more readily and likewise the more anxiously because he beheld a form in white drapery moving in the midst of a shady avenue near the extremity. Nearer and nearer he drew—but cautiously, in case it should not be the object of his search, although his heart told him that it was—until at length he was nigh enough to clear up all doubt. Yes: it *was* she—Juliana Farefield—the idol of his youthful heart—the dearly-beloved image that his soul cherished!—it was she, robed in the same white drapery which she had worn in the forenoon, when walking in that very same spot with George Hawkshaw!

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE TEST OF LOVE.

THE moment that Frank Paton became convinced the form he beheld was that of Juliana—the moment he caught sight of her splendid countenance framed by those massive bands of glossy raven hair—he shrank into the shade of the densest shrub just within the railings, on the outer side of which he stood, so that it screened him from her view. How should he be received? had she forgotten him? or, at least, had she ceased to love him? Would she resent his appearing before her? would she feel annoyed and indignant on beholding him in that mean, shabby attire?

Such were the misgivings which swept hurriedly through the mind of Francis Paton, and kept him transfixed with suspense and apprehension for upwards of a minute. But no, no—it was impossible! she could not have forgotten him! she could not have ceased to love him! she would not discard him because he came in poor apparel! And if she did——why, then the test would be accomplished; and it were better that he should learn his fate than linger on, entertaining hopes which after all would be never destined to receive fulfilment. Now was the moment to breathe her name!—she was passing near the shrub—she was barely four yards from the spot where he was concealed!

"Miss Farefield—Juliana," murmured Frank: and he held his breath with renewed suspense.

"Who calls?" she ejaculated with a sudden start: then stopping short, she swept her bright looks around. "That voice—Oh, that voice——"

A thrill of joy shot through the youthful heart of the lady's devoted lover: for in those accents there seemed to be wafted the assurance of continued affection, of delight, and of hope. He sprang forward—a cry of joy burst from Juliana's lips: he leapt over the low palings of the garden—he would have thrown himself at her feet—but she caught him in her arms.

"Dearest, dearest Frank," she murmured, pressing him again and again to her bosom, and covering his cheeks, his lips, and his forehead with the most impassioned kisses. "Dearest, dearest Frank, is it indeed you?"—and more fervidly still did she embrace him—more glowing and rapturous were the caresses she lavished upon him.

"Beloved Juliana——Oh, my beloved one!"—and he could say no more: his voice was choked with unutterable emotions of bliss, and joy, and ecstacy: and if he had leisure for a single thought apart from those feelings, it was in self-reproach that he had for an instant doubted her constancy or suspected her love.

"My own dear Frank—my heart's dearest Frank," she said, drawing herself the least thing back, but still keeping her arms thrown round his lithe and slender form: "let me look at you—let me gaze upon your beautiful face—let me look into the depths of those handsome eyes!"—and as she thus spoke, with the rich blood mantling upon her own hot cheeks, her regards, half tender, half devouring, wandered from feature to feature of that youthful countenance which was indeed of the most exquisite beauty.

"Then you do love me, Juliana?" murmured Frank, with a sweet smile that revealed the brilliancy of his ivory teeth: but he was allowed to say no more at that instant—for his lips were sealed by those of the impassioned lady, who again and again pressed him to her bosom.

"Love you, Frank?" she said, in a deep earnest voice: "love you? Oh, yes—I love you beyond the power of language to describe. You know that I love you! Did not your heart tell you so? or else why did you seek me again? Yes, beautiful and adorable boy—I love you—by this kiss I love you! And by this—and this—and this!"

"Oh, my own Juliana," murmured Frank; "a

thousand anxieties are now cleared up—a thousand cruel fears dispelled!"

"Ah, wicked boy!" responded the lady, now slightly relaxing the embrace in which she held him and looking with a sweet deprecating archness upon his countenance: "did you, then, think I had forgotten you? Why have you not sought me before? But come—we have much to say to each other: there is a shady arbour at the end of this avenue—we will proceed thither and converse. There is no fear of interruption, Come, dearest Frank, come!" —and she gaily and blithely led the youth along.

They reached the bower formed by thickly twining jasmine intermingled with roses, the flowers of which were in full bloom, and the whole supported by an over-arching trellis-work. Into this bower — one fully fitted for the sighs, and the kisses, and the language of love — Juliana Farefield conducted Frank; and they sat down side by side. She retained one of his hands between both her own; and then she looked at him—long and earnestly at first—it was with fondest adoration, this gaze of her's, fixed upon his glowing countenance - for the natural paleness of his cheeks was covered now by the mantling blood; and then it was with a growing expression of regret and sorrow on her part, as she surveyed the meanness and poverty of his apparel.

"Dearest Frank," she said, "you are not happy —you are not prosperous in your circumstances. I fear me that the world goes not well with you?"

"Alas, no!" responded the youth: and deeper grew the colour upon his cheeks—and he became covered with confusion; for he was now suddenly seized with an intense dislike for the part that he was enacting: he thought that he had already received sufficient evidences of Juliana's constant and devoted love to render a test unnecessary; and he was about to throw himself at her feet and reveal the motive for which he had come in that mean garb—when the thought suddenly flashed to his recollection that he had solemnly and sacredly promised his father, ere quitting London, that he *would* put her to that test, and that in no moment of weakness or infatuation would he abandon it ere ascertaining the full result.

"You were going to say something, Frank—you stopped short suddenly," said Juliana, contemplating him with renewed, or rather with redoubled attention. "I see but too plainly, my dearest boy, that things are not well with you: but, thank heaven! it is in my power to remedy them. Frank," she continued, in a half-reproachful, half-tender tone, "if you wanted for anything, why did you not write to me? You know that I am not without money; and even if I were, every jewel that I possess should have been placed at your service. Good God! my darling Frank, to think that you may have been in distress—to think that you could have lacked perhaps the necessaries of life——Oh, the thought is more than I can endure!"

Again did she seize him in her arms—again did she press him with almost convulsive violence to her highly swelling bosom—and again, too, did she lavish upon him the warmest, most impassioned caresses. Then she released him from her arms; and as if he were indeed the bright and beautiful idol of her adoration, she sat gazing upon him with a voluptuous tenderness. Again was his purpose shaken: again did he feel more than half-inclined to avow his object in presenting himself before her in an almost pauper raiment;—and there was a moment, too, when his heart swelled with a sense of the proudest feeling that he might, if he chose, proclaim himself to be rich—that he had found a father and a mother—and that they had promised to endow him with a fortune in case he should find Juliana all he hoped and wished, and should in due time lead her to the altar. But the very thought that he was in a condition to proclaim this triumphant intelligence, had the effect of reminding him of the solemn sacred vow which he had pledged to his parents that the test should be persevered in until the very end.

"Now tell me, dearest Frank," said Juliana, perceiving that he remained silent,—perceiving also that conflicting thoughts were agitating in his mind, but of what nature she could not guess: "tell me, my own dear Frank, what you have been doing with yourself? what has happened to you since we parted? It is nearly six weeks——Oh! it seems an age. But, thank God! it has only been for so short an interval—because whatsoever you may have suffered, has not therefore been of long continuance. Ah! did you think that because on that day when you were driven by my wicked mother from Saxondale House,—did you think that my lips would echo whatsoever taunts had flowed from her's? Did you think, my own dear Frank, that I could be so cruel or unjust as to visit upon you whatsoever deeds your sister might have done? No, no: you should have known me better—you should have known me better! But, thank heaven! you are come back to me at last!"

"Yes, dear Juliana—I have come back to you with only one hope in my heart:"—and Frank gazed most adoringly, most enthusiastically upon the splendid countenance of the patrician lady.

"And that hope, Frank?" she murmured. "Ah! you need not tell me what it is, I can understand it full well: because I likewise have cherished such a hope,—the hope that our loves might be renewed!"

"But let me explain this hope of mine, dear Juliana," continued the youth, now remembering the entire lesson which the Marquis of Eagledean had given him ere he left Stamford Manor. "You love me, Juliana - I know you do: the past has proved it—the present confirms it. But love has likewise a future, as well as a past and a present; and it is of this that I would speak to you!"

"Proceed, my dearest Frank," murmured Juliana, suffering her head to droop upon his shoulder, so that his cheek rested against her polished brow, and the long curls of his hair fell upon her own massive bands. "The music of your voice sinks deliciously into my heart. Proceed, dear Frank—I love to listen to you."

"Well then, my own Juliana," he continued, entertaining not the slightest doubt as to the result of the test to which he was upon the point of putting her, and longing to hurry it over that he might give her the assurance that it was nothing *but* a test, to be crowned by joyous revealings on his part relative to his own position, —"since you will listen thus patiently, I will speak. I said

that love has a future. What is to be the future of our love? I come to you, poor—unhappy—an obscure and unknown youth: my apparel denotes my condition—you yourself have already penetrated it—and you have given me your sympathy. Nay, more—you have assured me, in words as delicate as they were kind, that if I have suffered privations, it was my own fault for not applying to you—and that if I am still suffering under the cruel circumstances of the world, you will endeavour to amend them. For all this, dearest Juliana, accept my heartfelt, devoted thanks. No words are capable of expressing my gratitude!"

"Not gratitude, Frank," murmured Juliana, in accents laden with a sensuous languor: "but speak to me of love."

"It is of love, dearest, that I am about to speak," he continued. "I have said, therefore, enough to convince you of my position. You behold it—you have understood it. But poor as I am in purse, my heart is rich in boundless, illimitable love for you. There are two alternatives between which I have to choose. An opportunity presents itself for me to seek my fortune in a far-off land. That is one alternative. The other is, that if you will bestow your hand on me, you will raise me to your own rank in life, and I may have a chance of obtaining a livelihood in my native country. Those are the alternatives, dearest Juliana:—my decision depends upon the next words that issue from your lips."

If the Hon. Miss Farefield did not start—did not even raise her head from the youth's shoulder, when he thus undisguisedly, frankly, and even boldly demanded her hand in marriage,—it was because she was seized with a perfect stupor of astonishment. But he himself noticed not the effect which his words thus produced upon her, inasmuch as he could not behold her countenance: his cheek rested upon her temple. And she *was* astounded! As the reader is well aware, she had regarded Frank only as the object of a passion that devoured her—only as the means of assuaging the fires that were consuming her—only as a being whom she could cherish as the idol of a secret and illicit amour. But to become his wife—to sacrifice herself to one who had been a lacquey—to wed the poverty in which he seemed to be steeped—to descend from the pedestal of her patrician rank, and become the object of scorn and contempt on the part of all who knew her—to abandon likewise the brilliant prospect of becoming mistress of Hawkshaw Hall, with a husband whose generous confidence she felt assured of being able to abuse in all circumstances where her own particular pleasures and fancies might be concerned,—to consummate, in a word, all these tremendous sacrifices —— no, Juliana Farefield was utterly unprepared for such a result! She was astounded therefore at a demand, which, notwithstanding the fervid passion she experienced for Frank, she could not help regarding as a monstrous audacity on his part. Ah! it would have been very different indeed if he had revealed to her the whole truth—that he had found a father in the rich Marquis of Eagledean—that in due course he was to be publicly acknowledged as that great nobleman's son—and that his sire would give him a fortune, which, if not so large as Mr. Hawkshaw's, would nevertheless be an ample one;—very different, we say, would it have been, if Juliana had heard all these things from Frank's lips! *Then* she would have followed only the dictates of that powerful passion which she believed to be love—*then* she would at once have clasped that charming youth in her arms, murmuring an enthusiastic "Yes:" and throwing a veil over what he might have been in times past, she would have been proud, when she thought of him as her husband, for the present and the future. But as she knew nothing of all those things which young Paton might have revealed to her, had he chosen, she was at once struck with the seeming audacity and presumption of his demand; and not for a moment did she think of making what appeared to be so stupendous a sacrifice. Nevertheless, she could not endure the thought of losing him altogether; and she asked herself wherefore her original plans could not be carried out—that she should wed Mr. Hawkshaw and that Frank should continue her paramour?

For upwards of a minute did she remain motionless, half reclining in his arms, with her head resting upon his shoulder: then she slowly raised her countenance—and assuming her most winning, most seductive look, she said, "Listen to me, Frank."

"Proceed, dearest," he responded: for there was nothing in her mien or her manner to throw a damp upon his hopes.

"Listen, my dearest boy," she continued; "and I will tell you what I think, and what I propose after all you have said. As for the alternative of your fleeing from your native land to seek your fortune in other climes, it is cruel of you to hint at such a thing; and you must know perfectly well that I could not endure the thought. Then, as to the other alternative, we must look at it calmly and deliberately. Of what use would it be, Frank, for us to wed in order to be poor? I have no fortune; and I could neither endure poverty myself, nor behold you suffer it. You know that I love you devotedly—passionately; and you love me in return. We must make the best of circumstances; and they perhaps are not so unfavourable as you may apprehend. Now listen, dear Frank—and let me not see a shade gathering upon that beautiful countenance of your's: it must always brighten up with smiles to beam upon me, as mine shall ever beam smilingly upon you. Dear Frank, I have received an offer of marriage——"

"Ah!"—and the youth gave a quick spasmodic start, while the colour which had been slowly fading away from his countenance during the latter portion of Juliana's speech, suddenly vanished altogether.

"Why do you start thus? why do you turn pale?" she said, pressing his hand to her bosom, and at the same time looking with impassioned earnestness into his countenance. "Hear me to the end. I have received, as I was saying, an offer of marriage. In a worldly point of view, it is an advantageous one—though I need hardly assure you there is no affection on my side: for all the love that my heart had to bestow is your's—and your's only. Well, but this marriage will give me a social position, and will also give me wealth; and you, my dearest Frank, shall continue to be the real object of

my love—you shall have no care for your livelihood—no need to push your fortune in other realms——"

"And would you, Juliana," interrupted Frank, in a voice that was not merely low, but likewise hollow and gloomy—sad, and even startling to hear from the lips of one so young,—"and would *you*, Juliana, be guilty of such tremendous deceit towards a husband, and doom *me* to the degradation of being a hireling favourite—a pensioned paramour?"

"Dear Frank, how strangely you talk! One would really think," continued Juliana, "that you were affecting to speak like a Puritan:"—and she gazed upon him searchingly, to see if he could possibly be in earnest.

"O Juliana," he exclaimed, with a sudden outburst of emotion: "do not, do not let me think that it is you who have been speaking in a manner sufficient to astonish and bewilder me!—do not destroy the brightest dream that ever shed its golden influence upon the human heart! Recall everything you have said—tell me that you were seeking to put *me* to the test—that you were compelling me to pass through an ordeal for the purpose of assuring yourself that I am worthy to become your husband!"

"Frank, dear Frank, I am at a loss to comprehend you:"—and Juliana would have been really and truly angry, had not the youth seemed so eminently handsome at the moment, with the expression of lofty pride upon his brow, and of an earnest entreaty on his eyes and his lips, that she could not bear to reproach him.

"Look me in the face, Juliana," he said, his voice again becoming sad and mournful: "look me in the face—not as you are doing now, with all the blandishments of your beauty: but look at me seriously and steadily, and tell me deliberately and frankly whether you ere now expressed your precise meaning, and whether you still adhere to it—that you are to marry another, but that you will continue to regard me as——as——I cannot speak the word again! And yet pause, Juliana, before you answer me. Remember that your love has been given to me, and that we are already the same as husband and wife in the sight of heaven. Can you in honour—can you in delicacy—can you in decency, accompany another to the altar? can you so far deceive the confiding heart of some fond and no doubt good and honourable man, by suffering him to suppose that it is a virgin bride whom he is to receive to his arms?"

"Frank," responded the Hon. Miss Farefield, the flush of mingled indignation, shame, and humiliation rising to her countenance—for she was now truly indignant, and unable to conceal this anger of her's: "you are abusing the position to which my love has raised you in respect to myself. It ill becomes *you*, Frank, to make my weakness a subject of reproach: and did I love you less, I should be more offended still at this lecture which you are taking upon yourself to read me. Come, my dear boy—let me hear no more of such speeches from your lips. Have I not offered to do all that woman can for you? I must ensure my own position: and our happiness may remain uninterrupted. Dear Frank, tell me that you are satisfied with what I have proposed; and I will no longer be angry with you for the manner in which you addressed me. And now, do not be offended, my dear boy: but take whatsoever I have about me at this moment——here is gold ——"

Thus speaking, Juliana drew forth her purse: but with a sudden cry of indignation and aversion—of wounded pride and bitter disappointment—Francis Paton sprang up from the seat in the arbour, dashed the purse from her hand, and bending upon the astounded and even affrighted lady a look so strange, so wild, and so full of ineffable feelings, that it was never afterwards effaced from her memory, he cried, "No—everything is at an end between us! I have put you to a test, and I have discovered your real character. Thank God that I have done so! The veil of infatuation has fallen from my eyes. Beautiful serpent that you are, there is guile on your lips—poison throughout your entire being! Farewell—farewell, for ever!"

With these words he turned and fled precipitately.

"Frank, dearest Frank!" exclaimed Juliana, speeding after him: "come back to me—come back to me, I conjure you!"

But he heeded her not: the paling was reached—he sprang over it quickly: he flew across the park—and in a few minutes was out of sight.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

HAWKSHAW HALL.

As if flying away from a spot where the spells of a worse than Circean enchantment were to be avoided, Francis Paton sped across the fields, reckless of the course he was taking, and having no thought for anything but the magnitude of that disappointment which had succeeded the bright hopes so recently entertained. Indeed, he hurried onward as if for the purpose of outstripping that very thought,—a thought which kept pace with him—haunting him—circling him round about—appearing here, there, and everywhere—racking his brain, torturing his soul, sending pangs through his heart—making him feel as if the earth had nothing that he now need live for. In this manner the unhappy youth sped along through the fields for more than half-an-hour—until at length, wearied and exhausted, he threw himself upon a bank beneath a verdant hedge; and covering his face with his hands, burst into tears.

This outpouring of his sorrow proved a relief, and by degrees he found himself enabled to reflect with comparative calmness upon everything that had just occurred. But for the first few moments he could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was all a reality: it appeared like a dream. Was it possible that Juliana had never loved him as he could only wish to be loved?—was it possible that he had merely served her sensual phantasy, and that he had been regarded as one who would accept the lot of a profligate lady's paramour? Oh, that he should have been insulted by such a degradation!—oh, that he should have been subjected to such a humiliation! To have been a liveried lacquey in her mother's service, was mortifying enough, now that his circumstances were so altered: but to be deemed so lost to all honourable principle as to be proffered a position which was infamy itself, was enough to make his heart feel as if fiery scorpions were writhing around it. And then, too, to have

seen the mask so completely torn away from the countenance of her whom he had so fondly loved—to be compelled to look upon her henceforth as a snake wearing a beautiful skin—to have the conviction so rudely forced upon him that she was a lump of moral rottenness—corruption throughout from head to foot—steeped to the very lips in depravity——Oh, all this was sufficient to make him mistrust the whole world in future—almost sufficient to induce him to escape from it as from a morass swarming with reptiles!

Ah! these were stern and severe truths indeed for Francis Paton to admit into his soul: but nevertheless they *were* truths, and not to be rejected. But the longer he sat meditating on that verdant bank where he had thrown himself, the more did he see reason to appreciate the wisdom and the foresight of his father, the Marquis of Eagledean, who had so earnestly conjured him to put Juliana Farefield to the severest test. Ah! and he, in his infatuation—in his blind besotted confidence—in his fervid and enthusiastic trustfulness, would at one moment have abjured that test as an insult to her love—an outrage to the evidences of affection which she was lavishing upon him. Love! it was a mockery!——no: it was the baseness of a depraved passion. Evidences of affection!—no: they were the blandishments and the allurements in which the feelings of the profligate woman expressed themselves.

Francis Paton remained for more than half-an-hour seated upon that bank, giving way to his reflections. Suddenly, he looked at his watch, the chain of which he had been hitherto careful not to display, as the appearance of jewellery would but have ill-assorted with the studied penury of his garb. He looked at his watch, we say—and he found that it was six o'clock. The evening was delicious: but he had no power to appreciate the beauties of nature in the present condition of his mind. It was true that he had grown calmer through that half-hour's reflection; but still he was very far from being completely tranquillized. He was unhappy—restless—uneasy.

Rising from the bank, he wandered on again in a listless mood—not perceiving which direction he was taking, nor caring whither he went. On, on he walked at a quick pace: for the excitement of his mind was still sufficiently strong to make him proceed thus hurriedly: but it never once occurred to him to cast a glance around and assure himself whether he were proceeding towards Gainsborough or not. In this strange condition of mind, the youth continued his way through the fields. Another hour had passed: again he looked at his watch—it was seven o'clock. Yet, it was only in a sort of mechanical manner that he thus thought of the time, when he did not think of the path that he was pursuing: but presently the thought suddenly flashed across his memory, that he was thus wandering aimlessly and without purpose. He now stopped short and looked all around. Saxondale Castle was no longer to be seen: nor was he near any town that might be Gainsborough. He was in the wide open country, with here and there a few isolated cottages dotting the beautiful landscape. He began to compute that he must have walked some six or seven miles since parting from Juliana. He felt weary and faint, alike from fatigue and want of food: but he had no appetite—he craved nothing—he was sick at heart. He must however get back to Gainsborough as soon as possible: for his valet Edward, who had accompanied him into Lincolnshire, would be uneasy at his protracted absence. Bending his steps towards the nearest cottage, which was still at least half a mile distant, Francis Paton thus reasoned with himself:—

"Instead of giving way to sorrowful feelings, I ought to thank heaven for having followed my excellent father's advice and put Juliana to this test. Perhaps if I had at once told her that I had found parents who were enabled to give me a fortune, she would have consented to marry me: and, Oh! what an alliance would it have proved! Better, better far to place a viper in my bosom! Could I have expected that as a wife she would remain faithful to me? Ah! I should have believed it—I should have put confidence in her—my soul would have given her all its most loving trust—and some day, sooner or later, I should have been startled from my dream—I should have awakened to find myself deceived! Oh, it is a fortunate escape, and one that should fill my heart with gratitude instead of with useless repinings! But yet—but yet, it is hard to have had the golden bowl of hope thus rudely dashed from my lips to be broken at my feet: and it is difficult to banish that bright and beautiful image—*too* bright and *too* beautiful—from my mind!"

While thus meditating, the youth reached the cottage, which stood in a narrow lane intersecting a wide expanse of verdant meadows. A peasant couple, evidently husband and wife, with three or four little children, were sitting at their evening meal. Frank asked for a cup of milk: it was immediately supplied him; and not choosing to remunerate the woman in a direct manner for her hospitality, he put some silver into the eldest child's hand, bidding him "purchase a toy with it the next time his father took him to Gainsborough." He then inquired how far he was from that town?—he was told eight miles. How far was he from Saxondale Castle? for he wished to ascertain what distance he had walked since parting from Juliana:—he was told seven miles. Could he obtain any conveyance in the neighbourhood to take him to Gainsborough, for he had lost his way and was much wearied? But at the very moment that he had put this last question—and before it was answered—a gentleman on horseback rode up to the front of the cottage.

"Here's the Squire!" exclaimed the peasant, rushing out to see what Mr. Hawkshaw wanted.

It was a glass of ale or cider, whichever might happen to be in the place: for Mr. Hawkshaw was thirsty. Frank's first impulse was to stand aside from the vicinage of the open door, so as to avoid being seen by the Squire: for he did not wish to undergo the process of another interrogatory at that gentleman's hands—nor to have the pain of declining a renewed invitation which might possibly be put in respect to a visit to the Hall. But Mr. Hawkshaw had caught sight of him; and in a hurried whisper he asked the peasant whether a youth of such-and-such a description was not in the cottage? On receiving a reply in the affirmative, together with an account of the various inquiries Frank had been making, the good-hearted

Squire sprang from his horse—rushed into the cottage—and seizing the youth by the hand, exclaimed, "Now that you are on my territory, I take you prisoner. You have lost your way—you have been wandering about—you want a conveyance to take you back to Gainsborough—and you shall have one from the Hall: but only on condition that you come and dine with me first. My house is barely two miles distant; and if you are too much fatigued to go so far, I will scamper home and send down a gig to fetch you. Come, give your assent at once: for I shall take no refusal."

"Indeed, Mr. Hawkshaw," responded Frank, "I know not how to decline your courtesy without seeming positively rude and churlish. But the fact is, my servant is at Gainsborough: he will be very uneasy——"

"Your servant?"—and the Squire could not avoid the ejaculation: for it certainly struck him as most singular that this shabbily dressed youth, of poverty-stricken appearance, should be attended by a valet. "Well," Hawkshaw immediately continued, fearful that he himself had been guilty of a rudeness, "the moment we get to the Hall, one of my men shall take a chaise-cart across to Gainsborough and fetch your servant."

At this moment the sounds of a vehicle coming along the lane were heard; and a gig, in which a stout jolly-looking man was seated, came in sight.

"This is most opportune!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, looking through the cottage-window. "Here's Farmer Sladden—a capital tenant of mine, by the bye—and he will drive you on to the Hall. It won't be a quarter of a mile out of his way."

Frank could no longer refuse. He was too tired to think of walking any farther; and he had moreover conceived a friendship for the kind, frank-hearted Hawkshaw. He was likewise dispirited enough to feel that the companionship of such a host would be far from disagreeable; and he therefore accepted the proposed arrangement, with due acknowledgments of gratitude.

"You have nothing to thank me for, my young friend," said the Squire. "I owe you a great obligation:"—then rushing forth from the cottage, he beckoned Farmer Sladden to stop.

The gig drew up accordingly. Frank entered it; Mr. Hawkshaw requested Mr. Sladden to drive the young gentleman as far as the Hall; and remounting his horse, which the peasant had meanwhile been holding, he rode on a little in advance. In a short time a large and imposing-looking mansion, in the Elizabethan style of architecture, gradually stood forth from amidst the stately trees of an immense park; and Farmer Sladden informed his young companion that it was the Hall. He added that far as the eye could sweep all around, did Mr. Hawkshaw's domain extend. In a few minutes the porter's lodge at the entrance of the park was reached—the gates flew open—and the gig followed Mr. Hawkshaw up a gradual ascent of gravel road to the entrance of the Hall. There Frank alighted, thanking Mr. Sladden for his courtesy; and the worthy farmer drove away.

"Now, my young friend," said the Squire, when he had conducted his guest into a spacious, lofty, and handsomely furnished apartment; "tell me at once where your servant is to be found in Gainsborough; and one of my grooms shall go over and fetch him without delay. We will then have dinner: for I dare say you are hungry—and my appetite is marvellously keen. I am uncommon glad I was detained so long at Gainsborough, since it has afforded me this unexpected pleasure of meeting a second time with you."

Frank mentioned the hotel at Gainsborough where the servant would be found: and pulling out a well-filled purse, he begged that Mr. Hawkshaw's groom would become the bearer of the requisite funds to settle the account at that hostelry. While in the gig, Frank had fastened his handsome watch-chain in the usual manner to one of the button-holes of his waistcoat; and the sight of this appendage, together with the production of the amply furnished purse, made the Squire wonder more and more what possible mystery there could be about his new friend, and why with such adequate means his apparel should be so wretchedly mean and shabby. The youth was however still too much abstracted to reflect that these circumstances must indeed appear strange to his host; and therefore he thought not of volunteering any explanation. Of course the Squire spoke not a word calculated to show that he sought one.

The groom was despatched to Gainsborough; and immediately afterwards dinner was served up. The repast was alike substantial and excellent: there were no other guests; but until the dessert was placed on the table, a couple of footmen, in handsome though somewhat old-fashioned liveries, remained in attendance. The discourse, therefore, which passed between Mr. Hawkshaw and young Paton, was only upon indifferent and every-day subjects. But when the cloth was removed, and the board was covered with fruits and wines, the domestics withdrew; and then Frank, who in the meanwhile had found leisure for reflection as to the singularity of his position, thought that it was time to give a few words of explanation.

"Mr. Hawkshaw," he said, "in the first place I must renew my thanks for this generous hospitality on your part——"

"Not a syllable, Mr. Paton!" interrupted the Squire. "I have already told you that I consider myself *your* debtor. Thank heaven, the hurt I received has proved much more trivial than might have at first been anticipated."

"I am rejoiced to receive this assurance," answered Frank. "But I was on the point of observing that you must doubtless consider it strange to have beheld me wandering about in such a manner; and also," he added with a mournful look, "that I should be so poorly apparelled, although possessed of the amplest means."

"I don't seek to penetrate into your affairs, my young friend," observed the Squire; "and if you consider it necessary to give me proofs of your respectability, I can tell you at once I don't want them. Your speech—your air—your manners, are those of a young gentleman: but even if you were not, it would be all the same—for I am not merely under an obligation to you, but I have likewise conceived a great interest on your behalf."

"For this reason, therefore, Mr. Hawkshaw," responded Frank, "and in return for that generous assurance, I consider it my duty to tell you something respecting myself. Nay, permit me to do so. There is perhaps some little romance in the tale

that I am about to narrate; and at all events it will serve for conversation as well as any other topic."

"If you regard the matter in this point of view," observed Hawkshaw, "you shall have your own way. Now, fill your glass—and let us enjoy ourselves. I am sorry to see that your spirits are none of the best: but I must hope to contribute towards cheering them somewhat. I dare be sworn it is some love-matter: but pray do not for a moment fancy that I seek to make light of it—as I myself must plead guilty to having recently surrendered up my heart to the keeping of the most beautiful and virtuous of her sex."

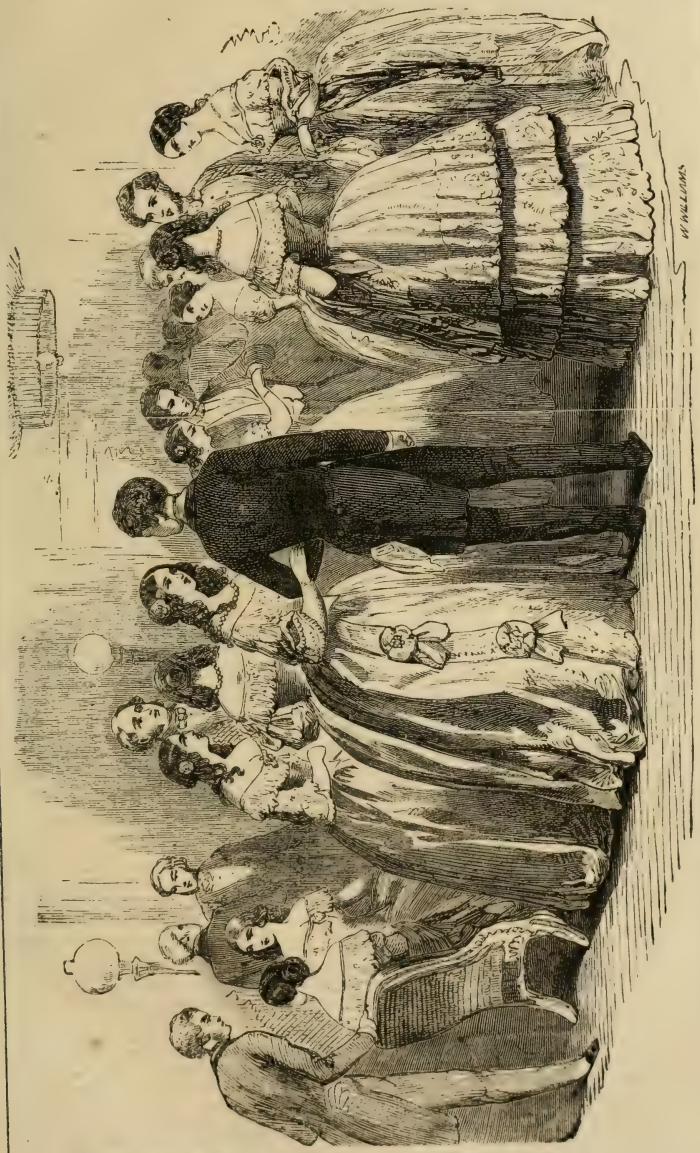
Frank heaved a profound sigh: for he could not help envying Mr. Hawkshaw the mingled confidence, satisfaction, and pride with which he was enabled—or at least thought himself enabled—to speak of the object of his affection.

"Yes," said the youth, "you have discovered the true key to the reading of my unhappiness. I have loved where I ought not to have loved. But permit me to give you some few words of explanation. And first of all, start not when I tell you that but very recently I was in a menial capacity, though having been well educated and properly brought up. However, such was the case. I *was* a menial, wearing the badge of servitude—an obscure and humble individual—more than half suspecting that my parentage was good, and yet without any certainty upon the subject. Indeed, I had not the remotest idea who my father might be—though, as I have already hinted, I had some reason to imagine my mother was a lady of rank. Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it was my good fortune—as I thought at the time—but my misfortune as I now discover it to be—to become the object of what I took to be *love* on the part of a young lady of marvellous beauty. I will not mention her name: I will not even give you the slightest idea of her portraiture. God forbid that, having loved her as I have done, I should do her an injury by proclaiming her secret! Suffice it to say that I saw she loved me. I loved her in return. Yes: ardently—fondly—adoringly did I love her! She was to me the object of a worship: her image sat enshrined in my heart like an idol in a temple. I would have laid down my life for her: there was no sacrifice possible to make that I was not prepared to make if called upon, and if such sacrifice on the part of so humble an individual as I was *then*, would have benefited her. Methought that she loved me as fondly and as well. Mr. Hawkshaw, inasmuch as I have not mentioned her name—as I shall not mention it—and as not a syllable will pass my lips to furnish an idea of her identity, should you ever meet her in the world—there can be no harm in confessing that she gave me the utmost proof which woman could give of her attachment."

Francis Paton stopped short: he wished he could have recalled the statement he had just made: he was fearful he had gone too far. It now struck him that Mr. Hawkshaw had casually mentioned, a few hours back, at the time of the accident, that he had just come from Saxondale Castle. He therefore knew Juliana: possibly he might some day learn that he (Francis Paton) had been in Lady Saxondale's service—and should this fact come to his knowledge, he might put two and two together, and thence arrive at the conclusion that Juliana herself was the heroine of the present narrative. Such was the transient fear which shot through the youth's brain. But it was only transient: for on a second thought, he saw that it would be very difficult indeed for Mr. Hawkshaw to imbibe any such suspicion or frame any such conclusion. Frank had been speaking vaguely: he had not said that it was a lady in the same house where he was a menial, who had formed an attachment for him. But would it not appear strange that he should this day have been seen in the vicinage of Saxondale Castle? might not *this* circumstance lead Mr. Hawkshaw to suspect something? Again did Frank see the perilous ground on which he had been treading, and the danger there was of seriously compromising Miss Farefield—which he was far too generous-hearted and too magnanimous to do. He therefore at once saw the necessity of deviating somewhat from the truth of his narrative, and making it appear that the lady of whom he was speaking, resided in quite a different neighbourhood from that in which he had first encountered Mr. Hawkshaw.

Such was the train of reflections which swept rapidly through the youth's brain; and though it has required a long space to record them, yet in reality they occupied but a few moments. Mr. Hawkshaw, perceiving that he paused and reflected, attributed this to the peculiar mood of his mind at the instant.

"Yes," continued Frank, "this lady of whom I am speaking, gave me the utmost proof of love: and methought that it was a real love, the sincerest and the fondest. Then came a whirl of circumstances, hurrying me on to the solution of the strangest destiny. I suddenly quitted the family where I was in service—I was separated from the object of my adoration—the mystery of my parentage was cleared up—I found that my preconceived suspicions were correct—my mother was a lady of quality—and more than this, I discovered that my father was a man of exalted rank. My fortunes changed all in a moment. After years of separation, my father and mother were brought together again. They are now married. You understand, Mr. Hawkshaw, from what I have told you—that I was not born in wedlock: nevertheless, I was the offspring of the tenderest and most faithful love. My parents are immensely rich: my father will give me a fortune whensoever I am prepared to settle in life. A few days back he learnt the history of my love for this lady of whom I am speaking. How did he act?—not sternly and implacably, as many fathers would—but generously, kindly, and considerately. He said, 'Go to where the object of your affection is at present to be found; appear before her in the meanest and poorest costume; suffer her to think that you are steeped to the lips in poverty; tell her a tale of hopeless prospects in this country, and of offers to amend your fortunes in a foreign clime: then ask her to become your wife. If her love be sincere, she will make every sacrifice rather than renounce you: if it be a mere gross passion, selfish and egotistical, she will refuse. By these means, my son, you will put her to the test. If she come out worthily from the ordeal, I will settle upon you two thousand a year: but if it prove otherwise, you will be rejoiced to think that you have escaped from your infatuation in respect to one so utterly undeserving of your regard.'—Thus



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spoke my father, Mr. Hawkshaw; and I came down to Gainsborough. For it is in the town of Gainsborough, at this moment, that for a few days the lady of whom I speak is staying: she is there on a temporary visit to some elderly relatives, who, though not so well off in the world as her own family, are nevertheless highly respectable."

The reader will perceive, in the latter portion of Frank's speech, those ingeniously contrived variations from the real circumstances of his story, which, while they did not impair the general truth of the narrative, were perfectly sufficient to conceal the identity of his heroine with Juliana Farefield.

"Having arrived in Gainsborough," he continued, "I dressed myself in this humble apparel which you see, and appeared before the young lady. I adopted the course which my father had recommended. But upon the details of the scene which ensued I cannot dwell farther than to give you the briefest outline possible. Would you believe it, Mr. Hawkshaw? she refused to bestow upon me her hand—but she shamelessly proposed to make me her pensioned paramour! She said that she would marry—she would contract a brilliant alliance—one that would give her riches; and that though she would take a husband's name, yet that my image alone should rule in her heart. I scorned her proposition—I repudiated it with loathing and horror. I fled from her presence. Cruelly excited, I wandered out of the town, along the bank of the river, not knowing nor caring whither I went."

"And it was under such circumstances as these, that I met you?" observed Mr. Hawkshaw, deeply sympathizing with Frank's affliction. "Ah, my poor young friend! you had indeed enough upon your mind at the moment; and yet you could so generously bestow your ministrations upon me! You will forgive me for having made certain offers ——"

"Forgive you, Mr. Hawkshaw!" ejaculated the youth: "how can you address me in these terms? Shall I ever forget your generosity? You fancied me poor—you offered to give me a start in life—it was most kind, most noble! For the present there are circumstances which induce my father to preserve an *incognito* before the world—he has a nephew to reclaim: but rest assured that when the moment comes that there is no longer any need for preserving this mystery, I shall write to you from London—I shall tell you who he is—he himself will write to you—and he will thank you for your kindness towards his son. He bears one of the proudest names of the British aristocracy: and well assured am I that you, Mr. Pawkshaw, whenever you visit the metropolis, will be a welcome guest at his house."

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Paton," returned the Squire, "to renew in London at some future period the acquaintance that has commenced thus singularly between us in Lincolnshire. And perhaps I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again before long: for, as I just now hinted, I am about to change my bachelor condition for the marriage state: and after the nuptial ceremony I shall repair with my bride to London. Ah, my young friend! how different is she whom I shall soon lead to the altar, from the heartless creature of whom you have been speaking! The object of my affection is all amiability, virtue, and excellence. She has been reared by an affectionate mother—a woman of strong mind, and who knew how to perform her duty to her children. The object of your love is handsome, you say: so is the object of mine—grandly handsome!—but therein is the only point of similitude between the two. Ah! what a tale of shameless profligacy have you revealed to me. Thank heaven, you have been discreet and delicate enough not to mention that lady's name: for if by chance I ever met her in society, I could not possibly help testifying the contempt and abhorrence with which her conduct has inspired me. You have indeed experienced a most fortunate escape; and instead of being downcast and unhappy, you ought to be cheerful and glad."

Frank sighed—but made no answer: the image of Juliana had been too deeply impressed upon his heart to be effaced all in a moment; and he wished that she were far less beautiful than she was!

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a footman, to announce that the groom had returned from Gainsborough, accompanied by Mr. Paton's valet, who had brought his master's luggage with him.

"Now, my young friend," said the Squire, when the footman had withdrawn, "I do not intend to part with you so easily as perhaps you may imagine. You must at least give me two or three days of your company here. You need not go near Gainsborough—the residence of your faithless one: but I will do the best I can to amuse you. There is to be a grand ball at some friends of mine—the Denisons'—to-morrow evening: and I shall be delighted to introduce you. You will meet all the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood, with their families. Do not say *nay!* Would you pine and mope for the sake of a worthless woman? Come, Mr. Paton, take my advice—seek rational pleasure and recreation, as the best means of driving her image from your memory."

Frank had drunk half-a-dozen glasses of wine; and his spirits were already somewhat cheered. He thought the Squire's advice sound and good. It was not merely his wish, but also his duty, to triumph over the unfortunate attachment which he had formed. He had moreover received such kind hospitality from Mr. Hawkshaw, that he did not feel himself justified in running away the first thing in the morning. And now, another idea flashed to his mind. He had parted from Juliana, leaving her with the impression that he was indeed the poor humble and obscure youth he had represented himself to be: he regretted that he had not tarried at least long enough to make her aware that it was not really under such circumstances he had sued for her hand—but that he was merely putting her affection to the test. He did not wish to expose her to the world: but his own sense of pride would not suffer him to leave her under the impression that it was a poverty-stricken, homeless, broken-down youth whom she had rejected. And again, too—so long as she laboured under that impression, she might fancy that he had been only influenced by selfish motives in endeavouring to win as a wife the elder daughter of the proud and magnificent Lady Saxondale. He could not endure the thought of being deemed thus selfish—thus egotistical; and therefore did the idea suddenly spring up in his

mind that his own pride and sense of honour required that Juliana should be disabused upon all those points.

Now, it was reasonable to suppose that she would be at the ball on the ensuing evening. What if he were to appear there also? He would not expose her: he need not speak to her—he need not even seem to notice her: but she would see *him* there, elegantly dressed—introduced by Mr. Hawkshaw; and as the Squire was acquainted with her, he would no doubt take an opportunity of whispering in her ear "that Mr. Paton was a youth in whom he felt interested—that he had only recently discovered his parentage—that this was noble, though he himself was illegitimate—that his prospects were brilliant—and that he had a fortune at his command!"

Such were the thoughts which swept rapidly through the youth's mind; and perfectly consistent they were with his tender age - his inexperience in the world—and the natural feeling of pride that he entertained on account of his altered circumstances. Had he been twenty-eight instead of eighteen, he would have possibly r flected and acted otherwise: but as it was, he suddenly resolved upon the course which was thus chalked out. He accordingly accepted Mr. Hawkshaw's invitation to remain a day or two at the Hall; and the Squire was heartily glad at the decision to which he thus came.

Perceiving that his youthful guest was very much wearied, Mr. Hawkshaw proposed that he should retire for the night; and with a cordial shaking of the hands, they separated.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE BALL.

WELL indeed might Francis Paton be wearied and exhausted, after the many long miles he had walked that day, and the excitement of mind through which he had passed. Scarcely, therefore, did he lay himself down to rest in the handsome but old-fashioned chamber to which he was shown, when sleep fell upon his eyelids.

On awaking in the morning, the sun was shining in at the window. He looked at his watch, and found that it was nearly ten o'clock. Springing from the couch, he rang the bell; and his valet soon made his appearance. All that Frank required of him was to put out a more suitable apparel than that which he had worn on the preceding day; and when this was done, Edward was dismissed while the youth performed his toilet—for he was neither affected or fastidious enough to need assistance during the process.

But while he was thus engaged, he reflected more seriously and more deliberately than he was enabled to do on the preceding evening, on the course he had resolved to adopt by appearing at the Denisons' ball. All the motives above specified, and which he had already weighed, remained undisturbed: but there was a danger, which now occurred to him that made him hesitate. What if Lady Saxondale should herself be at the ball, and should take it into her head to denounce him as the brother of a female highwayman?—thus renewing the malignant spirit in which she had expelled him from her mansion. Yet would she dare do this? would she take so bold a step when she found him in the companionship of a man of such evident wealth and standing as Mr. Hawkshaw? No: it was not probable. Besides, Frank could not see how her ladyship entertained any spite against himself: he was unaware that she had discovered his amour with her daughter; and therefore he came to the conclusion that if she beheld him at Mr. Denison's she would pass him by unnoticed—perhaps not even recognize him at all. But still there was another consideration: might not Juliana, on beholding him there, become overwhelmed with confusion, and thus betray to Mr. Hawkshaw that *she* was the lady of whom the Squire had heard so sad a tale? We have already said that Frank did not seek to expose her: he was too generous—too noble-minded—and there was a sufficiency of love lingering in his heart to render him averse to the infliction of any unnecessary pain upon Miss Farefield. Should he, then, go to that ball? Ah! did he not know that Juliana had an immense power of command over herself? Yes, surely;—and on second thoughts, he calculated she would pass him coldly by, with the air of one who had never seen him before in all her life. Therefore, everything considered, Frank decided upon remaining fixed in the resolve formed on the preceding evening.

Having completed his toilet, he descended to the breakfast-parlour; and Mr. Hawkshaw, who was already there, rose to welcome—not the poor-looking youth of the previous day—but an elegantly dressed young gentleman. The Squire had been up for hours: as early as seven o'clock he was galloping over his estate; and returning by nine, had taken a tankard of ale and a somewhat massive sandwich to allay the cravings of hunger until his guest should descend to the breakfast-table. And sumptuously provided was this breakfast-table, to which they both sat down: the board literally groaned beneath cold viands, pies, and poultry—ham and tongue—various sorts of potted meats and marmalade—besides some fish, fresh caught from the river that morning. The Squire did the most ample justice to his own good things: and if he had confessed to Frank the little incident of the tankard of ale and the huge sandwich, the youth would have stared in most unfeigned wonder at the havoc which Mr. Hawkshaw was still enabled to make among the comestibles.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Paton," said the open-hearted gentleman, "what I can best do to amuse you to-day. I sha'n't offer to take and introduce you to any of my friends in the neighbourhood; because I know that the mere ceremony of morning calls is irksome and uninviting enough. Besides, you will see all the *elite* of the county at the Denisons' in the evening; and then you can take your choice in respect to those whose acquaintance you may choose to form. I myself usually make one call every day," he added, with a smile; "and you can guess upon whom—the lady who is to be Mrs. Hawkshaw: but I will send a note presently to excuse myself for this one occasion——"

"I beg and beseech that you will do nothing of the sort," interrupted Frank. "I should be truly sorry to deprive you of the pleasure of paying your accustomed visit. I myself shall be well pleased to ramble through your beautiful grounds——"

"No, my dear Mr. Paton," said the Squire; "I am not going to leave you to your own resources.

So not another word upon that subject. But, by the bye, did you go and have a look at Saxondale Castle yesterday? Ah! I dare say you were in no humour for anything of the kind——"

"Nevertheless," responded Frank, successfully concealing the agitation which this allusion to Juliana's home conjured up, "I did approach near enough to that fine old edifice to see as much as I cared for. But I have no great taste that way: I feel no particular interest in seeing antique buildings. I would much rather go and take a long ride or walk through the midst of the charming scenery which I behold from this window."

"As for walking, my dear Mr. Paton," replied Hawkshaw, with a smile, "you must have had enough of it yesterday: so if you please, we will take a good ride together. According to your proficiency in horsemanship, can I accommodate you. If you like a somewhat spirited steed, be it so: but if you prefer a quiet gentle animal, but a fast trotter withal, such a one shall be at your service."

"I must confess," said Frank, "that I should prefer the latter: for I cannot pretend to have any equestrian skill at all."

The Squire and his guest now rose from the breakfast-table, and proceeded to the stables. Mr. Hawkshaw possessed a large stud, comprising some of the finest horses in the county. He had a pack of hounds and harriers; and an hour was spent in the inspection of the equine and canine departments of his spacious establishment. All the while he conversed with such frankness of heart and in such cheerful spirits, that young Paton felt himself considerably elevated from the despondency and gloom into which he had previously been plunged. It was impossible not to catch some portion of the Squire's exhilaration: besides, Frank was little more than eighteen years of age, and that was not a time of life when disappointment in love renders the victim so utterly disconsolate as to think seriously of quitting the world and turning hermit.

Mr. Hawkshaw and his youthful guest, mounting the horses that were gotten in readiness for them, rode forth across the country. There was a variety of beautiful scenery on the Squire's estate, with the contemplation of which Frank was much charmed: for his was a mind that could appreciate the loveliness of nature, and receive, as it were, poetic inspirations therefrom. Nor less was he in reality curious and interested with regard to fine specimens of architecture: he had therefore done himself an injustice when at the breakfast-table he affected an indifference with regard to Saxondale Castle. But this, as the reader has no doubt understood, he did for the purpose of preventing Mr. Hawkshaw from starting a proposal to take him in that direction.

After a long ride, a farm-house was reached, where the Squire purposed to halt and take lunch. He was well known there, although it was not upon his own estate; and most welcome were he and Frank made by the occupants of the homestead. Having refreshed themselves, they remounted their horses and returned to the Hall by another route, so that Frank had farther opportunities of beholding the charming scenery of that part of the country. It was about four o'clock when they reached the mansion; and the interval until dinner time was occupied by an inspection of the interior of the house itself. There was a fine library, consisting chiefly of old works accumulated by Mr. Hawkshaw's father, who was much more of a book-worm than his son and successor. There was likewise a fine gallery of pictures; and there were a few good busts and statues. Thus, in the inspection of these objects of interest, the time passed away quickly enough till six o'clock, when dinner was served up. After the repast Frank and the Squire adjourned to their respective chambers, to dress for the grand ball that was to take place at the Denisons' that evening.

It was with a beating heart that Frank performed this toilet; and now he *did* suffer his page Edward to assist him: for he was resolved to lose none of the advantages that dress might bestow. Not that he entertained the slightest idea of endeavouring to assert so complete an empire over the heart of Juliana, as to pave the way for a reconciliation, to be crowned by marriage. No: he vowed within himself that everything should indeed be at an end between herself and him. But if the plain truth must be spoken, it was with a feeling of boyish vanity, natural and intelligible enough, that Frank on the present occasion made the best of all the resources and advantages of the toilet which were at his disposal. When it was achieved, he could not be otherwise than well satisfied with his own appearance: for he looked eminently handsome. The well-cut garments set off his slender and symmetrical figure to the fullest advantage: the evening costume became his somewhat feminine style of beauty most admirably. The flutter of his heart's feelings sent up the colour to his cheeks, which were usually of a classic paleness; and when he descended to the room where Mr. Hawkshaw was waiting for him, the worthy Squire felt quite proud of the interesting youth whom he was about to introduce to the circle of his acquaintances; for he foresaw that Frank's presence there would cause a complete sensation.

The old-fashioned chariot,—which had belonged to the Squire's grandfather, and which the Squire himself so very seldom used, save and except when going to evening parties,—was in readiness soon after eight o'clock. The place of destination was about seven miles distant; and it was reached at nine: for in the country such entertainments as these commence at an earlier hour than in London. Mr. Denison's mansion was of an immense size, and contained suites of apartments spacious and lofty enough to remind one of the baronial halls of former times. The family itself has already been spoken of as one of the oldest and richest in all Lincolnshire. The father and mother were kind-hearted hospitable persons: the old gentleman was sure to form a friendship for any one who would praise his wines—the lady was as certain to take a liking to any one who appeared to relish the substantial fare served up at her board. They had several sons and daughters, most of them married and settled in different parts of the same county: these were all present at the ball of which we are speaking. Most of the guests had arrived when Mr. Hawkshaw's carriage drove up to the front of the mansion. There were perhaps three hundred persons altogether assembled; and, as the Squire had hinted to his youthful companion, these consisted of the *elite* of the entire neighbourhood for several miles round.

It was with a heart beating more violently than while performing his toilet or during the drive thither, that Francis Paton, arm-in-arm with Mr. Hawkshaw, followed the powdered lacquey up the spacious and well lighted staircase, to the first of the suite of rooms which were thrown open for the reception of the company. It was here—in what was called the Ante-Room—that Mr. and Mrs. Denison had stationed themselves to receive their guests. Immediately upon crossing that threshold, Frank swept his quick glances around: but amongst the ladies and gentlemen who were lounging there previous to passing into the next apartment, which was called the Saloon, he discerned not Juliana Farefield. The footman announced Mr. Hawkshaw in a loud voice; Mr. and Mrs. Denison at once came forward to receive him. Cordial shakings of the hand took place; and the Squire hastened to observe, "Permit me to introduce a young and very particular friend of mine—Mr. Paton. He is on a visit to me at the Hall; and I have taken the liberty of bringing him hither, knowing that he would be welcome."

"We are delighted to see Mr. Paton," said Mrs. Denison, at once, and with more cordiality than would have been shown in the less genial circles of London fashionable life, extending her hand to greet the youth.

"Any friend of *my* friend Hawkshaw," said old Mr. Denison, "is sure to receive a kind welcome, here:"—and he in his turn shook Frank by the hand.

Some other guests were announced at the moment; and the Squire, accompanied by Frank, strolled into the Saloon, where the bulk of the company were assembled, and where tea and coffee were served up. This was an immense apartment; and it was not with the first quickly sweeping glance that Frank was enabled to discern whether Juliana was there or not. All around—on chairs, ottomans, or sofas—elegantly apparelled ladies and well-dressed gentlemen were seated. Here and there small groups were standing to converse: and in other parts ladies were sitting, while gathered around them, was a knot of young gentlemen standing in that gracefully lounging attitude which is so often seen. The immense apartment was flooded with the light poured forth by three superb lustres, and which was reflected in the magnificent mirrors, as well as by the diamonds and the costly ornaments worn by the guests. Amongst the female portion thereof, there was no insignificant display of beauty; and bright eyes, as well as mirrors and gems, shone brighter in the powerful effulgence streaming from the lustres.

Mr. Hawkshaw, with Frank on his arm, strolled through the Saloon, nodding familiarly to those with whom he was most intimate—bowing more formally to those with whom he was less acquainted—and also looking around to see if a certain lady-guest had yet arrived. Need we say that the object of his eyes' research was Juliana Farefield?—and thus was it that, without having the most distant suspicion of the fact, he and his young friend were both alike on the look-out for one and the same being. She was not however there; and having reached the extremity of the room, the Squire and Frank sat down, while a footman hastened to serve them with coffee.

As Mr. Hawkshaw had foreseen, Frank's appearance at once created much curiosity and interest. All eyes had followed him as he walked through the apartment, leaning on the Squire's arm: the exquisite beauty of his countenance—his symmetrical and graceful figure—the aristocratic polish which appeared to invest him as naturally as if he had passed all his life in patrician halls, attracted the notice of every one present, and made him the "observed of all observers." Who has he—this interesting young stranger? Such appeared to be the general question, whispered in some parts of the room—asked by means of a rapid exchange of glances in others. The Squire and Frank did not remain long alone where they had seated themselves: some of the principal male guests approached to shake hands with their friend Hawkshaw—and they were of course introduced to Mr. Paton. A little knot was soon collected there; and the youth became engaged in discourse with his new acquaintances. Presently Mr. Denison approached; and seizing an opportunity when Frank was talking to some others, the old gentleman whispered to Hawkshaw, "You have brought us quite an acquisition this evening. I can assure you that a great number of ladies have already been asking Mrs. Denison who the interesting young stranger is."

"He is connected with one of the highest and noblest families of the British Aristocracy," responded the Squire aside to Mr. Denison. "He is well off, too," he added with a smile; "and if it be any satisfaction to the fair sex, you may safely whisper that on the day of his marriage his father will give him a fortune of a couple of thousand a-year."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Denison. "He certainly is a most interesting and fascinating youth. Does he purpose to make a long stay in Lincolnshire?"

"I am afraid not," responded Hawkshaw. "I mean to keep him as long as I possibly can: but I know that he is very anxious to get back to London."

"That's a pity," rejoined the old gentleman. "However, we must make the most of him while he *is* in the county. By the bye," he added jocularly, at the same time poking the Squire in the ribs, "are you serious in your intentions in a certain quarter? ——you know where I mean. Come now, Hawkshaw, don't make a mystery of it. All the county is talking of your constant visits to the Castle. But it is also rumoured that Lady Saxondale herself is likely to change her condition—and that Lord Harold Staunton is to be the happy man. I don't know how true it may be: but you at least ought to be in the secret."

"Well, I suppose," responded the Squire, laughing, though amidst some little degree of confusion, "there is no use making a mystery of it. All that you have surmised is correct. But don't go and tell every body that I am engaged to Miss Farefield. I only proposed yesterday; and you are the first person outside the walls of Saxondale Castle that I have mentioned it to. I would much rather keep it as quiet as possible till the event comes off: for when these things get known, one is stared at, and so bantered—and I really can't bear jesting on such a point."

"Well, well," answered Mr. Denison, laughing in his turn, "I will keep your secret, Hawkshaw. But

the music has struck up in the ball-room! I must go and get Mrs. Denison to find a suitable partner for your young friend here—for of course he dances."

A splendid band, which had been procured from Lincoln, had commenced playing at the moment when Mr. Denison spoke of it; and the company were beginning to move through the immense folding-doors of the Saloon into the adjacent apartment, where the dancing was to take place. Mr. Denison, retracing his way across the Saloon, returned to the Ante-Room where his wife was receiving the guests. At this moment the footman announced Lady Saxondale and the Hon. Miss Farefield. Mr. and Mrs. Denison hastened forward to receive these two brilliant arrivals; and when the usual greetings were exchanged, the lady of the mansion said, "But how is it that Lord Harold Staunton is not with you? I felt certain that your ladyship would have ensured us the honour of his presence."

"He went on a fishing excursion yesterday," responded Lady Saxondale,—"remained out till late—and caught a severe cold. I can assure you, my dear Mrs. Denison, that he deeply regrets his inability to wait upon you this evening. I am afraid we ourselves are rather late—the company appears to be already numerous——"

"The ball is about to open," responded Mrs. Denison: then addressing herself to Juliana, she said, "Will you permit me to introduce as your partner for the first quadrille, such a charming acquisition which we have received this evening, and whom Mr. Hawkshaw brought us?"

"Indeed!" said Juliana, with a smile: for she little suspected what she was about to hear. "Who is this phœnix of whom you are speaking?"

"Mr. Paton," replied Mrs. Denison. "Look! he is standing at the farther extremity of the Saloon, talking to Lord Blackwater and Sir John Knightley. What an elegant youth!"

Fortunate was it alike for Juliana and Lady Saxondale that at the very moment Mrs. Denison mentioned the name of *Paton*, both she and her husband turned their heads to look through the wide open doorway into the Saloon where the youth was standing. For while on the one hand Lady Saxondale turned pale, on the other hand the colour mounted in its deepest crimson glow to her daughter's cheeks. Yes: sure enough, there was Frank, elegantly attired—looking as if he had never been otherwise than the occupant of splendid drawing-rooms—the handsomest, the most tastefully dressed and the most interesting of all the guests present upon this occasion!

Lady Saxondale was utterly ignorant of all that had taken place between Frank and her daughter on the preceding day: she did not even know until this instant that he was in Lincolnshire at all. She had for some time past ceased to think of him—though the moment the name was mentioned, it conjured up into her mind all past circumstances with regard to himself and Juliana. Her ladyship was astounded and bewildered to behold the youth *there*—elegantly dressed—looking as if he were as perfectly at home in a splendid drawing-room as if he had never dwelt in a servants' hall—and introduced, too, by Mr. Hawkshaw, her daughter's intended husband!

On the other hand, Juliana was equally astounded and bewildered. What could it mean? how came he thus handsomely dressed?—he who on the previous day had appeared before her in the meanest garb! But how had he fallen in with the Squire? Had there been explanations between them? had Frank betrayed her secret? had Hawkshaw decked him out in order to bring him thither to consummate a terrific exposure of herself? For an instant she felt as if she could pray that the floor would open under her feet and swallow her up: but the next moment she said to herself, "No—Frank would not betray me: he is too generous. There is some strange coincidence, the mystery of which has to be explained. In any case, however, I have a difficult part to play. Courage, courage!—and above all things, calmness and composure!"

"And pray, who is this Mr. Paton?" asked Lady Saxondale, in a somewhat cold and proud tone: for she thought it best to ascertain at once under what circumstances the youth could have formed the acquaintance of Mr. Hawkshaw, and thereby gained an introduction to the mansion where he was now found.

"Oh!" quickly replied Mr. Denison, "he belongs to one of the best and highest families in the kingdom: he is very well off too—at least a couple of thousand a year. Hawkshaw told me so just now—he knows all about him—but I hadn't time to learn any more particulars, for the music struck up and I was coming to ask Mrs. Denison to select a partner for Mr. Paton."

At this moment some new guests arrived: Mr. and Mrs. Denison hastened to greet them; and Lady Saxondale stepped aside with Juliana to exchange a few hurried observations.

"Can you read this mystery?" inquired the mother.

"I confess that I cannot," answered the daughter.

"But is it possible, think you, that this boy has told Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"No—I do not think so," interrupted Juliana, the liveliest carnation again mounting to her features. "He would not do it; and if he had, the Squire would not make a scene here. No—it is ridiculous!"

"Well, you know them both best," said Lady Saxondale. "But you will not think of dancing with that boy? No doubt he has invented a tissue of falsehoods to impose upon Mr. Hawkshaw about his rank and his fortune. Indeed, the whole thing looks ominous, Juliana."

"Mother, recollect our compact," said the daughter impressively. "The affair is mine—leave me to manage it. Depend upon it I shall know how. On your side, breathe not a word relative to Frank's antecedents: you had better pretend not to know him."

"I shall certainly follow your advice," answered Lady Saxondale, half haughtily, half sarcastically.

"Now, Miss Farefield," said Mrs. Denison, "when you and her ladyship have taken a cup of coffee, I will introduce Mr. Paton to you. Permit me to escort you both into the Saloon."

We must here observe that at the spot where Francis Paton and Mr. Hawkshaw were located at the farther extremity of that immense apartment, they could not see what was taking place in the

ante-room where the Denisons received their guests; and it happened that just at the moment when Lady Saxondale and Juliana looked through the doorway and beheld Frank in the manner above described, neither he nor the Squire were glancing in the same direction at the time. But Frank had heard, from some remark which had been made close by, that Lady Saxondale and her daughter were expected to be present at the ball; and he had therefore armed himself with all his presence of mind—all his coolness—all his self possession, in order to meet the crisis, whenever it should arrive, in a becoming manner. On the other hand, Mr. Hawkshaw—as we have already seen in his conversation with Mr. Denison—did not wish it to be generally known at once, that he was engaged to Juliana: he had remained a bachelor quite long enough to dread the sly jokes and bantering jests of his friends at the approaching change in his condition. He therefore had made up his mind not to rush forward with a marked and pointed eagerness to greet Juliana when she should make her appearance.

And now Lady Saxondale, accompanied by her daughter, and escorted by Mrs. Denison, entered the Saloon, after the above-described little scene in the ante-room. The mother was, as usual, invested with that well-bred but graceful dignity which sat upon her like a superb mantle elegantly worn; and no one who looked upon her exceeding handsome countenance, would for an instant suppose that on entering that brilliantly lighted suite of apartments she had experienced the minutest incident calculated to excite her vexation or her alarm. As for Juliana, she likewise was collected and self-possessed to all outward appearance,—reflecting the calm and high bred dignity, mingled with the graceful ease and elegance, which characterized her mother: but her heart was fluttering and palpitating, not through any lingering apprehensions on account of Francis Paton's presence there, but at the idea of meeting him again so unexpectedly and under such unaccountable circumstances.

"Here are Lady Saxondale and her daughter!" observed Sir John Knightley, with whom Frank and Mr. Hawkshaw were conversing at the moment.

"Ah!" said Frank, affecting just that degree of interest which might be supposed to be excited by the mention of a name of no small consequence in the county: "that is Lady Saxondale?"

"Yes—and the other is the Hon. Miss Farefield," rejoined Sir John. "Do they not look more like sisters than mother and daughter?"

"Take care, Knightley, what you are saying," observed Lord Blackwater, in a jocular tone, and with a sly glance towards Hawkshaw. "The Squire is smitten in that quarter, you know."

"Come, let us go and pay our respects," interrupted Sir John Knightley: and taking his lordship's arm, they lounged with fashionable ease towards the ottoman on which Lady Saxondale and Juliana had that moment seated themselves.

Frank, more absorbed than he had fancied he should have been, was looking in a furtive and sidelong manner towards Juliana at the moment when Lord Blackwater made that allusion to Hawkshaw; and therefore it was lost upon him. As for the Squire himself, he was likewise too intent in gazing upon the object of his adoration to notice the little circumstance. Thus did these two continue totally unsuspicious that the same being was engrossing so large a share of each other's attention.

We must now interrupt the course of our narrative to describe a little incident that took place at this particular juncture. Mr. Denison had remained in the ante-room, conversing with some gentlemen, after his wife had escorted Lady Saxondale and Juliana into the Saloon. Scarcely had those ladies thus passed into that splendid apartment, when a footman made his appearance and handed Mr. Denison a letter. Apologizing to those gentlemen with whom he was discoursing, for leaving them for a few minutes, Mr. Denison stepped aside to read the epistle which, having come by the evening mail from London to Lincoln, had been sent over to his mansion. Its contents ran as follow:—

"Stamford Manor, London.
"August 14th, 1844.

"My dear Denison,

"You will no doubt be surprised when you perceive the signature of your old friend Years have elapsed since we met and since we corresponded: but I know your kind heart too well to entertain so injurious a suspicion as that the friendship which commenced in our school-days—was renewed at college—and was continued for some years afterwards, is in any way impaired, on your part, by the lapse of time. You may believe in my sincerity when I assure you that I long to shake you by the hand.

"I am once more in England: but for the present it suits me to preserve a strict *incognito*. I am married to the object of that love which I confided to you long years ago, and which has never ceased to animate my heart. But though you were acquainted with that love of mine, you suspected not all the circumstances attending it. You knew not that I was a father. Such however was the case. I cannot now enter into particulars: these shall be given when we meet—which I hope will be soon.

"My object in penning these few lines, is to inform you that my beloved son, Francis Paton, is at the present time in Lincolnshire. He is to be found at the principal hotel at Gainsborough It is possible—if circumstances cause him to prolong his stay there—that he may need the counsel of one who, through friendship for his father, will advise him kindly and conscientiously. Is it, therefore, asking you too much to seek him at that hotel? Show him this letter—and he will confide to you the object of his visit into Lincolnshire. But forget not, my dear friend, that for the present I do not wish it to be known that I am in England.

"Your's most sincerely,
"EAGLEDEAN."

Mr. Denison read this letter with feelings of mingled astonishment and gratification—astonishment that the youth whom accident had brought to his house should be the son of his oldest and most valued friend—and gratification to think that he should thus have already been enabled to show him some little attention, even before knowing who he was. But Mr. Denison was a discreet man; and he determined therefore to observe inviolably the secret which had just come to his knowledge. Putting the letter in his pocket, he at once passed into the Saloon, and advancing straight up to Francis Paton, began to converse with him in the kindest and most friendly manner. Mr. Hawkshaw, perceiving that Frank was thus the object of special attention on the part of the host, did not now

scruple to leave him for a few minutes while he proceeded to pay his respects to Lady Saxondale and Juliana. Mr. Denison then took Frank's arm; and gently leading him away into the ball-room, still continued to converse in the most affable manner, though upon general and indifferent topics. They passed though the ball-room—traversed a smaller apartment—and then entered a conservatory filled with evergreens, orange-trees, rare plants from the tropics, and a variety of choice flowers. This place was lighted with wax-candles; and in its coolness was most refreshing after the heated atmosphere of the other rooms.

"My dear young friend—for so you must permit me to call you," said Mr. Denison, "I wish to know whether there be any way in which I can serve you? whether you need the counsel or succour of one who feels a deep interest in you? But stay!" he exclaimed, perceiving that the youth gazed upon him in surprise: "read this—and then you will understand wherefore I am thus familiarly addressing you."

Frank took the letter which Mr. Denison handed him; and having perused it, he remained lost in thought for upwards of a minute, while a profound sadness settled upon his countenance.

Mr. Denison," at length he said, "I return you my sincerest thanks for the kind feeling you have demonstrated towards me. Before I left London, my father mentioned that he had an old friend residing in this county, to whom he offered to give me a letter of introduction: but I thought not that my stay would be prolonged——indeed, it was by mere accident that I became Mr. Hawkshaw's guest——"

"Then Mr. Hawkshaw is acquainted with all to which this letter alludes?" said Mr. Denison, inquiringly.

"No," responded Frank; "he knows nothing beyond the mere fact that my parents are rich and noble—and that I myself, alas! am the offspring of a love which, at the time of my birth, bore not the sanction of marriage."

"But the purpose for which you are come into Lincolnshire?" said Mr. Denison.

"Yes—Mr. Hawkshaw is to a certain extent acquainted with that," rejoined Frank. "It is somewhat a long tale to tell——"

"And evidently not a pleasant one," interrupted the worthy old gentleman, grasping the youth's hand and pressing it kindly. "We will not converse any more upon the subject now. To-morrow you and the Squire must come across and dine with us. For the present, endeavour, my dear young friend, to enjoy yourself and enter into the gaieties of the evening. And now let us return to the Saloon, where Mrs. Denison will be proud to find you a suitable partner."

Again taking the youth's arm, Mr. Denison conducted him away from the conservatory, through the ball-room, back into the Saloon.

In the meantime Squire Hawkshaw, as already stated, had proceeded to pay his respects to Lady Saxondale and Juliana, who were seated with Mrs. Denison. He placed himself next to his intended; and for the first few minutes the conversation was confined to mere drawing-room generalities; but Juliana, as well as her mother, was convinced by the Squire's manner that he had heard not a syllable from Francis Paton's lips to alter his sentiments in any way with regard to the former.

"By the bye," observed Lady Saxondale, after a brief pause in the discourse, "you have a friend here with you this evening, Mr. Hawkshaw?"

"Yes—and it was owing to that horse of mine,—you know," he continued with a smile, "to which I allude?—that I formed Mr. Paton's acquaintance. In short, I met with a little accident yesterday—I did not mean to tell you of it—but since it is necessary to account for my falling in with that very interesting young man——"

"An accident?" said Juliana, in a low tone, and pretending to fling upon the Squire a look full of apprehension, which Mrs. Denison could not help noticing; and she was at no loss to suspect the cause, although she certainly little thought that it was assumed.

"Oh! but it was nothing, I can assure you," said the Squire. "I was thrown at a gate—not leaping it—it was all my own fault—sheer carelessness on my part——However, Mr. Paton, who was passing along at the time, rendered me the requisite assistance; and the result was his visit to me at the Hall."

"And does he purpose to make a long stay in Lincolnshire?" asked Lady Saxondale, as if merely in a conversational manner.

"No—it was with some difficulty I could induce him to remain a day or two with me. He is a well connected youth——"

"Do you know anything of his family?" inquired Lady Saxondale, still with the same seeming indifference.

"No—but I have heard enough from his lips to be assured that he is of the highest respectability. Indeed, his whole appearance,—his manner—his conversation, stamp him as the well-bred young gentleman."

Lady Saxondale drew herself up slightly, but made no farther remark: she remembered her compact with Juliana, and did not choose to violate it.

"I dare say," observed Mr. Hawkshaw, addressing himself to Miss Farefield, "that you will become acquainted with my young friend in the course of the evening, and I am sure you will be pleased with him."

Mrs. Denison was at the moment making some remark to Lady Saxondale; and Juliana said, in a low quick whisper, to Mr. Hawkshaw, but with an arch smile upon her countenance, "And shall you not be jealous, my dear George, if you see me dancing with that handsome youth whom you have brought hither to turn all the ladies' heads?"

"Not I indeed!" he responded, also with a smile, but which was as replete with frankness and ingenuous confidence as that of his intended was hypocritical and feigned. "I think too highly of you, my dearest Juliana, to be jealous."

"I am glad to hear you speak thus," she responded, "But have you mentioned to Mr. Paton that—that——we are engaged?"

"No: I don't talk of those things. Of course the Denisons and many others suspect it——"

"To be sure!" rejoined Juliana: "but I agree with you it is much better to say as little as possible on such a subject. How elegantly Mr. Paton is dressed!"—and this remark she made to endeavour

if possible to elicit from the Squire the cause of the discrepancy between the youth's apparel on the present occasion and that which he had worn on the preceding day.

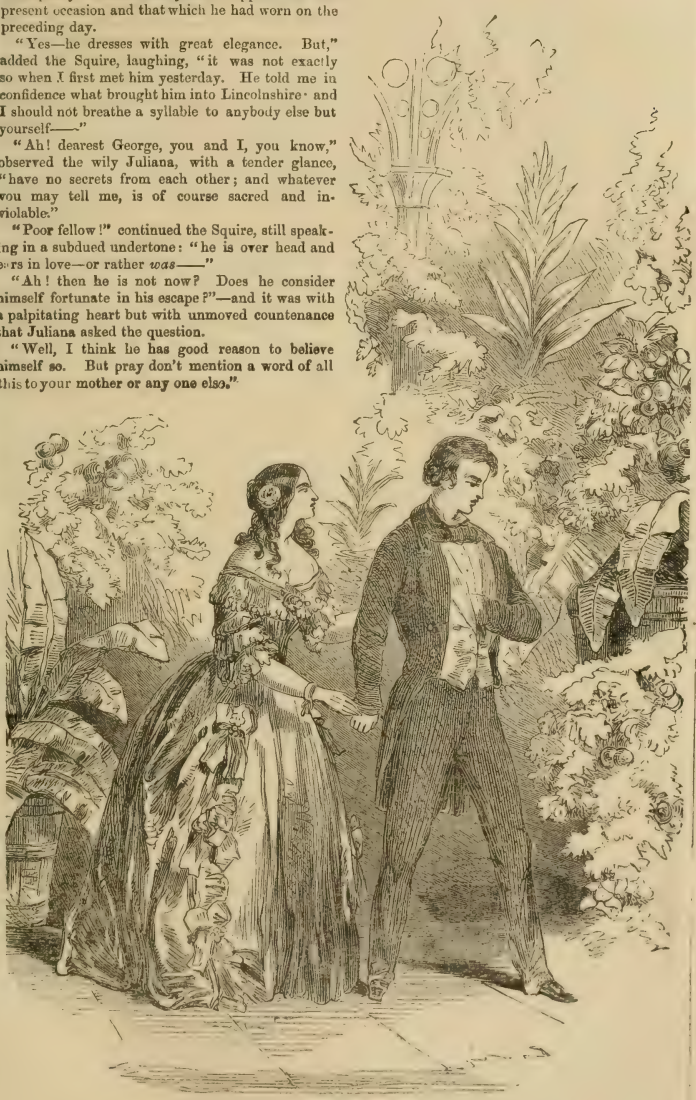
"Yes—he dresses with great elegance. But," added the Squire, laughing, "it was not exactly so when I first met him yesterday. He told me in confidence what brought him into Lincolnshire and I should not breathe a syllable to anybody else but yourself——"

"Ah! dearest George, you and I, you know," observed the wily Juliana, with a tender glance, "have no secrets from each other; and whatever you may tell me, is of course sacred and inviolable."

"Poor fellow!" continued the Squire, still speaking in a subdued undertone: "he is over head and ears in love—or rather *was*——"

"Ah! then he is not now? Does he consider himself fortunate in his escape?"—and it was with a palpitating heart but with unmoved countenance that Juliana asked the question.

"Well, I think he has good reason to believe himself so. But pray don't mention a word of all this to your mother or any one else."



"Not for the world!" rejoined Juliana. "Pray go on. I see that there is something very romantic and interesting about this youth—all the more interesting too, my dear George," she added with witching cajolery, "since you yourself have formed a friendship for him."

"The fact is," proceeded Hawkshaw, "he was in love with some lady whose name he very discreetly suppressed, and of course I did not question him upon the subject——"

"A lady in this neighbourhood?"

"Properly belonging to London, but staying at Gainsborough just for the present. My young friend's fortunes have recently changed: so he came to put her to the test—dressing himself out in the shabbiest and meanest style——"

"Oh, what a device!" observed Juliana: and she affected to titter gaily, while inwardly she was racked with the bitterest feelings. "And what was the result?"

"Unpropitious to my young friend's views. But where is he?" suddenly exclaimed Hawkshaw. "I left him with Mr. Denison at the other end of the room. Pray excuse me for a minute—I must not leave him alone, as he is a perfect stranger here: he will feel awkward and embarrassed in the midst of a crowd of persons unknown to him. And mind, dear Juliana—not a syllable to your mother of all I have been telling you!"

"Oh, fear not, dear George! You know you can trust me."

Mr. Hawkshaw flung upon her a look full of tenderness; and then rising from the seat where he had been carrying on this whispered discourse with Juliana—while her mother and Mrs. Denison were conversing together on their side—the Squire proceeded towards the ball-room. At that instant Mr. Denison and young Paton were returning into the Saloon; and they accordingly encountered the Squire on the threshold between the two apartments.

"I shall leave you, Mr. Paton, with your friend Hawkshaw for a few minutes," said the worthy old gentleman, "while I go in search of Mrs. Denison that she may do the honours of the house towards you."

With these words he hurried away, and was traversing the Saloon, when he perceived his wife in company with Lady Saxondale and Juliana. He immediately accosted the group, saying to his spouse, "I was looking for you, my dear, that you may fulfil your intention of introducing Mr. Paton to Miss Farefield."

"Mr. Paton's appearance beneath your roof, Mr. Denison," said Lady Saxondale, "seems to have excited quite a sensation. I have been asking Mr. Hawkshaw who his young friend is——"

"And Mr. Hawkshaw has told you, mother," interrupted Juliana, with a quick deprecating look at her parent—as much as to remind her of the previously expressed desire that she would not meddle in the matter,—"Mr. Hawkshaw has told you precisely what Mr. Denison himself had already stated."

"To be sure!" ejaculated this gentleman. "Am I to understand that there is the slightest doubt as to Mr. Paton's respectability?"

"Oh, far from it!" exclaimed Juliana. "My mother could not possibly mean such a thing. It is sufficient to find Mr. Paton within these walls to be assured of his respectability."

"But what is more," rejoined Mr. Denison emphatically, "I can answer for it—I will guarantee it. There may perhaps be some little mystery attending him, but which will all be cleared up in good time. Suffice it to say that I know who he is——"

"Indeed!" said Lady Saxondale, fixing her eyes keenly upon the old gentleman, to ascertain, if possible, to what extent his knowledge thus reached.

"Yes—I know that his father is a nobleman of very high rank," responded Mr. Denison.

"Is this youth, then, the Hon. Mr. Paton?" inquired Lady Saxondale: "or Lord Paton —— or——"

"Unfortunately," answered Mr. Denison, in a subdued voice, "there is a circumstance connected with his birth——But I need say no more—— Suffice it to add that I *do* know who his father is —he is a very old friend of mine—immensely rich, and fully able to give his son a proud position in the world."

"Dear me, Mr. Denison," said his wife, "how came you to learn all this? I am sure I am delighted to hear it; for I felt quite an interest in that youth the moment I beheld him——"

"This is no time for explanations," interrupted Mr. Denison. "I only tell you what I know and what I will guarantee. Come, my dear," he added, still speaking to his wife, "let Mr. Paton join the next quadrille with Miss Farefield, if she will permit us to introduce him?"

"Oh! with much pleasure," said Juliana, in a most courteous and affable manner.

Thereupon Mr. and Mrs. Denison hastened away to fetch Frank; and Juliana whispered quickly to her mother, "You perceive therefore that Hawkshaw has not been misinformed, and that the youth has not devised any false statements."

"It is altogether a mystery," replied her ladyship, "which I cannot comprehend."

"But at which I am less astonished than you, mother," responded Juliana: "for I all along knew that there were strange things connected with the parentage of Francis Paton."

"He is approaching, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale. "Take care, take care how you play your cards—or you will lose Mr. Hawkshaw."

A few moments after these words were uttered, the Denisons came up with Frank; and the lady of the house introduced him in the usual manner. Lady Saxondale bowed with a cold and distant reserve—Juliana with as much affable courtesy as under the circumstances she dared show: but with all the power of control she was enabled to exercise over her feelings, she could not prevent the colour from coming and going rapidly on her cheeks. Frank, on the other hand, was very pale, but perfectly collected. As he gave his arm to Juliana, he felt that her hand trembled as it touched him; and a galvanic gush of indescribable emotions was sent thrilling through his entire form.

CHAPTER C.

THE CONSERVATORY.

MRS. DENISON remained in conversation with Lady Saxondale—Mr. Denison hastened to receive some fresh arrivals of gentlemen—Juliana and Frank passed on into the ball-room, neither of them giving utterance to a single word. Mr. Hawkshaw, well pleased in the generosity of his heart to perceive that his young friend had thus become introduced to his intended bride, joined a knot of gentlemen who, like himself, did not dance, and fell into conversation with them.

Frank and Juliana entered the ball room. The first quadrille had just terminated: in a few minutes the second would commence. They took a seat during the interval. Both felt the embarrassment of their position: but each was inspired with very different sentiments from those which animated the other. On the one hand Frank merely wished to assure himself that Juliana was already acquainted, through the medium of Mr. Hawkshaw or Mr. Denison, with his altered position: but if not, it was his purpose to make it known, so far as he dared with due regard to his father's *incognito*. When once this should have been accomplished, there need be no farther intercourse between them: for although Frank could not so suddenly fling off the spells which the lady's beauty and fascinations had cast upon him, yet was he firmly resolved not to suffer himself to be betrayed into any weakness.

On the other hand, Juliana felt that she had a difficult and delicate course to pursue. She had no longer any doubt, after all she had just been hearing, that Frank's social position was indeed greatly changed; and she was most anxious to learn whether he would now constitute a match sufficiently eligible to warrant her in jilting Mr. Hawkshaw. If so, she was prepared to take that step. Although now acquainted with the stratagem which Frank had executed to put her to the test, she had such confidence in her own charms, her fascinations, and her endearments, as to flatter herself that she need only bring them all into full play in order to reduce him to the condition of a suppliant at her feet. Nevertheless, with all her natural effrontery—with all her spirit of intrigue—with all her worldly-minded calculating disposition, she could not help feeling embarrassed and awkward during the first few minutes they were thus thrown together on the present occasion. Moreover, her pride would not suffer her to be the first to break the silence which still reigned between them; and there was also a certain amount of rancour and bitterness in her mind at the test to which young Paton had so ingeniously put her.

Frank likewise experienced all the awkwardness of this silence; and if he did not immediately speak, it was that he knew not how to commence the conversation. He more than half regretted having placed himself in such a position. He began to comprehend that it was his own little pride and boyish vanity, more than anything else, that had all along urged him to be present at this ball; and he felt somewhat humiliated in his own eyes—lessened in his own conceit—diminished in his own opinion, at the thought that he should have been guilty of such weakness. But soon he began to reflect that having become Miss Farefield's companion for the present, he had no right to treat her with a reserve or coolness that could not fail to be shortly noticed by other couples lounging or sitting in the ball-room; and notwithstanding all circumstances, he saw that he was bound to treat her at least with a show of external courtesy and politeness.

"Do you prefer to remain seated here, Miss Farefield?" he inquired, not knowing what else to say: "or would you rather walk a little?"

"I am perfectly well contented," she responded, "to do whichever *Mr. Paton* thinks fit:"—and as she thus spoke, in a tone of mingled reproach and archness, she accentuated his name.

"The quadrille is about to commence," he said: "shall we stand up and take our places?"

"With pleasure. Are you fond of dancing?"

"Perhaps," he rejoined, in a cold ironical tone, "you meant to ask me whether I *could* dance? You forget, Miss Farefield, that I was well educated and trained at Southampton, before circumstances reduced me to a menial condition."

"This observation on your part, Mr. Paton," she replied, in a voice that trembled as if her feelings were indeed much hurt, "is most ungenerous and uncalled for. When I asked you if you were fond of dancing, I meant no more than would have been intended by yourself, had you put the same question to me. I think, Mr. Paton, if you will condescend to tax your memory, you will find that while you were as yet in ignorance of your parentage, I expressed the conviction that your birth was infinitely superior to your condition at the time."

"True!" murmured Frank: and the recollection that Juliana *had* spoken nothing but the exact truth, struck him with a feeling savouring of remorse for the coolness which he himself was now maintaining towards her: moreover, he felt that he had been unjust in the harsh rebuke he had administered—a rebuke, too, which according to her assurance she had so little deserved.

"Yes—it is indeed true that I thus spoke to you at the time," she said, perceiving that there was a change in his countenance, and penetrating the feeling which had produced it. "Had it not been my conviction that you were of gentle birth, never, never——But I ought not to be speaking thus! After what took place yesterday, I presume that I am to consider everything to be at an end between us?"

"Miss Farefield," answered Frank, again recovering the perfect mastery over himself, "I have a few words of explanation to address to you: but it is impossible they can be spoken in this ball-room. For your sake, much more than for mine, the greatest discretion must be used. When the dance is over, if you will favour me with a few minutes' attention, we may perhaps find an opportunity to speak in that conservatory which opens from the adjoining apartment."

The quadrille now commenced; and Juliana, perceiving at a glance that Mr. Hawkshaw was not amongst the lookers-on in the ball-room, resolved to play off all the artillery of her charms upon Francis Paton—but at the same time not to do this in a manner that should be noticed by the guests generally: for if in the long run she should either lose Frank, or else come to the conclusion that Mr. Hawkshaw was the preferable match, she did not

wish to stand a chance of alienating the latter. But there are a thousand and one ways in which an artful and designing woman can play the game of witchery and fascination unperceived by those around. A tender glance quickly darted and as quickly withdrawn—a gentle pressure of the hand—a half-stifled sigh, to be heard only by him whose ears it is specially intended to reach—and that momentary fond clinging which the routine of the dance allows—these are the means by which the artful fair one may, under such circumstances, conduct the campaign against the object of her wiles.

Frank saw it all—felt it all—but could not comprehend it all. Did she really love him? did she regret the scene of yesterday? was she making as much amends as, without too much self-prostration of her own pride, she could possibly offer? ought he to pardon the circumstances of the previous day? ought he to make allowances for them, considering her position? In a word, what ought he to do? what ought he to think? He was bewildered: and he was too young, as well as having been but too recently under the spells of this dangerous woman, to remain insensible to those pressures of the hand—those tender looks—those softly subdued sighs—those transient but raptured clingings to him in the mazes of the dance. And it was not all acting nor simulation on Juliana's part: for, as the reader is aware, she did love this beautiful youth—that is to say, loved him after the fashion of her own sensuous nature; and at all events it was a strong passion on her part. But at length the dance was done: the couples promenaded round the room—and Frank conducted Juliana into the adjacent one. Thither they strolled without the appearance of premeditated design, and as any others might have done. No one was there: they passed into the conservatory—and here likewise they were alone.

We should observe that Miss Farefield was dressed for the present occasion in a style of simple elegance. She was arrayed in white: for the olive of her skin was of that delicate and transparent tint which rendered this virgin attire perfectly compatible with her complexion and her style of beauty. Indeed, it served to set it off to the utmost advantage. She usually wore her hair in bands: but this evening she appeared with it showering in myriads of luxuriant ringlets down upon her shoulders! Oh, how bright was the gloss upon that raven hair! how it shone with a natural glory, all its own! A single camelia with a circlet of pearls made it look darker than the darkest night: and yet it was a lustrous cloud which thus framed the superb countenance. The low *corsage* of the dress displayed the sculptural richness of the bust: the excitement of the dance and of her own feelings sent the rich blood glowing and mantling upon her cheeks. Altogether she appeared of a more splendid beauty on this occasion than ever she had seemed before in the eyes of Francis Paton. He felt troubled and bewildered, fully aware that the spell of almost irresistible fascinations was upon him, yet equally well-knowing that it was his duty to shake them off—and more than half fearing, as he had thought on the previous day, that this splendid creature was but a snake wearing the loveliest skin.

"And now, Frank," she said, in a low melting murmuring voice, and fixing upon him those lustrous eyes that were brimfull of passion, "you have some words to address to me. Remember that we cannot remain too long here—we shall be missed—we shall be sought after——"

"Miss Farefield," responded the youth, endeavouring to speak as coldly and collectedly as he could, "I will not detain you many minutes."

"Wherefore do you address me in this formal manner?" she asked, with reproachful look and voice. "Am I no longer *Juliana* to you?"

"How can you be?" exclaimed Frank, at this moment feeling that he had regained complete power over himself, as all the incidents in the arbour on the preceding day trooped through his mind. "Did you not tell me that you meant to marry another? By what right, then, can I address you with the insolence of familiarity?"

"Insolence—familiarity! Oh, dearest Frank, is it possible that such words as these are to pass between us?"

"Listen, Miss Farefield," interrupted the youth, drawing himself up in a dignified manner. "Yesterday I offered you my hand—and you refused it. It is therefore as a rejected suitor that I stand before you. Think you not that I have my own feelings of pride? and is it possible that what took place in that arbour can be recalled? No—impossible! But I would not have you think that I was selfish and egotistical in seeking the hand of the elder daughter of the titled and brilliant Lady Saxondale! Circumstances have much altered with me of late—but not in the sense that I gave you to understand yesterday. It is true that what the world may call *a stigma* rests upon my birth: nevertheless my parents are of noble rank—my father possesses immense wealth—and he will shower riches upon my head. He and my mother are now married: they are acquainted with the love which I had cherished for you——"

"Ah, then, dear Frank, you did love me—Oh, you did love me! and you must love me still!"—and as Juliana thus spoke, she threw her arm around the youth's neck; and ere he could disengage himself from her embrace, she had imprinted a kiss upon his lips.

Nevertheless he did so disengage himself: for he had been speaking of his father and his mother—their images were now in his mind—he remembered his duty towards them—he remembered the counsel he had received—and he was determined to follow it.

"You draw yourself away from me," said Juliana: and she spoke coldly and distantly, for her pride had just sustained a severe shock.

"You told me that you would marry another—and whoever the man of your choice may be," responded Frank, "I will not be guilty of any outrage towards him."

"Ah, all this is intended as a bitter sarcasm to myself!"—and now tears started forth from Juliana's eyes—but tears of mingled spite and vexation.

"Do not weep," said Frank, much moved: for he comprehended not the true source of those tears. "Heaven forbid that I should speak sarcastically or upbraidingly towards you! I only reminded you of your duty—or rather proclaimed what I felt to be mine."

"Ah! now you speak kinder, Frank—and I am soothed," said Juliana, taking his hand which was not immediately withdrawn: and she pressed it

tenderly. "Think you not that I am delighted to hear of this change of fortune which you have experienced? Yes—most sincerely do I congratulate you!—and all the more so, because, as you remember, I foresaw it. I all along knew, from the very first moment I beheld you, that you were above your condition—infinitely above it! You told me as much of your history which you yourself knew at the time: do you not mean to make me your confidante in respect to the remainder? Who is your father, Frank? Do not think that I ask out of mere curiosity——"

"Miss Farefield, I cannot tell you now. Suffice it to say that his title is that of a Marquis."

"*Miss Farefield*——still *Miss Farefield!*" she murmured reproachfully and sorrowfully: "is the rupture then complete between us? O Frank, I forgive you for the cruel test to which you put me yesterday: will not you forgive me for what fell from my lips? You say that your parents are acquainted with our love: was it they who suggested that you should put me to such a test?"

"It was," rejoined Frank: "I do not attempt to deny it. But pray understand me. That test I regarded as conclusive! I fled from you in disappointment—in despair. I did not pause to tell you that the representations I had made were false—that I had purposely apparelled myself in mean clothing to give a colour to my story: I did not wait to tell you all this, because I was not master of my feelings at the time. But subsequently, on calmer reflection, I felt that I could not leave Lincolnshire without giving you the fullest explanations. I did not wish to pass in your eyes as a miserable needy adventurer, seeking a patrician marriage as the stepping-stone to better fortunes. I felt that if you looked upon me in this light you would have but too good reason to despise me, and to rejoice that you had refused me your hand. But this is what I wish you to understand—that inasmuch as you loved me when I was poor, and humble, and obscure, I felt proud and rejoiced at the thought that fortune had suddenly placed me in a position when I might on terms of equality offer you my hand. Ah! had you told me yesterday, Juliana—Miss Farefield, I mean—that no matter how poor and humble I might still be, you would sacrifice everything to become my wife, how different would our feelings be at this moment! Now I have no more to say. Let me conduct you back into the other rooms."

"No—not yet, Frank—not yet!" murmured Juliana, again clinging to him—but not kissing him this time, only looking up earnestly and appealingly into his countenance. "You have said all that you have to say: hear me a few words in reply. It is true that I spoke to you yesterday in a manner that may have shocked you: but did I not likewise speak with tenderness and with love? Did I not offer to make every sacrifice that one in my position could possibly consummate? If I dreaded poverty, it was as much on your account as on my own—perhaps more on your's. To acquire gold therefore, that I might conduce to your comfort, I said that I would marry: and how great must my love be for you, when I was enabled to tutor my soul to think of the marriage-tie as a mere expedient for ensuring our happiness, and not as a barrier against it! Do you not think, Frank," continued the wily Juliana—but still tender and impassioned, even at the time when she was thus exercising all her astuteness and all the powers of her sophistry,—"do you not think, Frank, that it cost me a pang to propose that I would become a wife only to deceive a husband in order that the progress of our loves might continue uninterrupted? But perhaps you consider me a being lost to all sense of delicacy and propriety——Oh, Frank, can it be possible that you entertain such an evil opinion of one who loves you so tenderly and so well?"

She was still clinging to him as she thus spoke: she was gazing up into his countenance with a look of the most tender and impassioned appeal: she had thrown into her voice all the most melting cadences of its natural harmony: she omitted no single one of the many blandishments which a woman of artful nature and glowing temperament could possibly exercise on such an occasion. Again was Frank bewildered and troubled—again was he uncertain how to act or what to think. He disengaged himself not from the half-embrace in which she retained him; but he averted his countenance as if the only hope that remained for him was in *not* beholding that beautiful—too beautiful face, which was upturned towards his own.

"Frank," she continued, thoroughly prepared to jilt Mr. Hawkshaw if young Paton would now succumb to her wiles,—"Frank, is it possible that you can forget the interview of yesterday? Is it possible to efface it from your mind—to blot it out from your memory? If so, ask me once more whether I will accompany you to the altar. Ah, it is a hard thing for a young lady of my rank and position to have to put this restraint upon her feelings and do this violence to her pride, which I am doing now, when sueing to him who is of that sex which generally sues to mine! Yes, Frank—I ask you to recall your decision of yesterday: I beseech you not to judge me by it. I tell you that if you still love me—if you think that you can be happy with me—it will be the most joyous day of my life when I take your name and look upon you as my husband. And, Frank," she continued, in a still softer, more tremulous, and more murmuring voice, "remember that I have some claim alike upon your indulgence and your love: for am not I already the same as your wife in the sight of heaven?"

This last appeal completed the trouble and bewilderment which were influencing young Paton at the moment. He felt that it had gone to his very heart—that there was as much justice as there was truth in it—that he owed her forgiveness because he owed her reparation. Infatuated boy! he did not pause to reflect at the moment that it was not he who had seduced Miss Farefield from the path of virtue: it was she that seduced him—that he never should have dared to make the slightest overture to *her*, but that every encouragement and provocative had come from herself. Of all this he did not think: he heard the appeal—it murmured in his ears—it thrilled through his brain—it went down into his heart—it excited the most generous feelings of his soul. He looked upon her as if she were a young creature who in all trusting love had surrendered up her honour into his keeping, and to whom he was bound to make every possible atonement. Juliana comprehended full well everything that was passing in his mind: she saw the advantage she had gained;

and her bosom already swelled with the exultation of approaching triumph—for she had rather, much rather, marry this youth who was the object of her passion, now that she knew him to be the son of a wealthy Marquis, than she would wed George Hawkshaw, although the fortune of the latter might be greater than Frank could hope to receive from his sire.

Another moment—and young Paton, forgetting his father, forgetting his mother, forgetting all their counsels—lost in the intoxication of love—entangled in the maze of witcheries and sophistries, blandishments and appeals, which the syren had put in play,—in another moment, we say, he would have yielded—he would have succumbed. His eyes were already bent adoringly upon Juliana—he was drinking deeper and quicker draughts of Lethean bliss from her own warm and glowing regards—his arm was tightening around her—he was on the point of straining her to his breast, and murmuring the affirmative which would have been so delicious to her ears and so fatal to his own happiness,—when all in an instant the sound of a footstep and a loud cough startled them both up from the trance of their feelings.

Rapid as lightning was the look which Juliana flung upon Frank, to bid him summon all his self-possession, as she collected hers; and the next instant she said, as calmly and quietly as if there had been no excitement of feelings—no whirlwind of emotions, "Yes, as you were observing, Mr. Paton, this is indeed a rare collection of plants."

The next moment Mr. Hawkshaw made his appearance from behind the mass of evergreens and exotic verdure. The first thought that flashed to the mind alike of Frank and Juliana, was that he had overheard all: for his countenance looked pale. But this apprehension was cleared up almost as soon as formed, when he said in his usual off-hand openhearted manner, "Well, you have sought the coolest spot—and really I am not surprised; for those rooms are suffocating."

"I could not endure the heat any longer," said Juliana: "and I requested Mr. Paton to accompany me hither for a few minutes. I felt as if I were about to faint——"

"Indeed! I am truly sorry to hear that," ejaculated the Squire, with a look of concern. "I hope you feel better now?"

"Yes—much, much," responded Juliana. "And now I shall take your arm, Mr. Hawkshaw, and accompany you back into the Saloon. Mr. Paton," she added, turning round and flinging a rapid but significant look upon the youth, "I have not forgotten that you have engaged me to dance again in the third quadrille after the one which is next to take place."

Frank bowed; and Juliana, with a graceful salution in acknowledgment, took Mr. Hawkshaw's arm.

"You are coming with us—are you not, Paton?" said the Squire: "for as you are comparatively a stranger here, we must not leave you alone."

The youth muttered something, he knew not what; and in a strange state of bewilderment, he followed Mr. Hawkshaw and Juliana out of the conservatory. The terror which at first seized upon him, had left a sort of stupor behind: yet it was only on Juliana's account that he had been thus alarmed—for he still entertained not the remotest suspicion of the attachment subsisting on the Squire's part towards her, or the engagement formed between them. But now that he heard Mr. Hawkshaw conversing with even more than his wonted hilarity with Juliana, as she leant upon his arm, he felt convinced that nothing had been overheard by him: for he remembered how emphatically the Squire had said on the preceding evening, that if he were to meet the lady who had behaved in such a manner to Frank, he could not possibly be civil to her.

As for Juliana herself, she was equally well assured that the Squire had not caught a syllable of what was taking place in the conservatory at the time he entered. She attributed that appearance of pallor on his cheeks to the flickering play of the lights, which were partially agitated by some little currents of air which penetrated through the glass-work in the conservatory. The young lady, though still bent upon her project with regard to Frank, was resolved to retain two strings to her bow even until the very last: so that should one fail, she might adopt the other.

Passing into the Saloon, Mr. Hawkshaw conducted Miss Farefield to the sofa where Lady Saxondale was seated—while Mr. Denison intercepted Frank and conducted him to the refreshment-room: for the worthy host was anxious to pay all possible attention to the son of his old friend the Marquis of Eagledean. On returning to the Saloon, the youth was introduced to a young lady of great beauty, with whom he danced the next quadrille; and for each of the two following, other partners were also provided by Mrs. Denison. Then Frank recollected the hint he had received from Juliana, to the effect that he was to consider himself engaged to her for the dance next ensuing: but for a moment he hesitated whether to attend to it, or not. He had re-awakened from the trance of fascination—he was master of himself once again—he remembered his father's counsel—and his conscience told him that he should be doing wrong if he were to yield to the influence of Juliana's endearments. Still he felt that he could not so far insult her as to take no notice of the hint she had given him; and he resolved that though he would dance with her, he would not again conduct her to the conservatory. Approaching the spot where she and her mother were seated,—Mr. Hawkshaw having in the meantime sought the refreshment-room,—Frank made his bow: Juliana bestowed upon him a sweet smile and a tender glance; and they proceeded to the ball-room together.

"When the quadrille is over," said Juliana, "we will find an opportunity of exchanging a few more words. But be guarded—be cautious!" she immediately added: for as her eyes swept rapidly round the ball-room, she perceived Mr. Hawkshaw amongst the lookers-on at the extremity.

The warning would have been quite unnecessary, —inasmuch as Frank, now having complete control over his feelings and his actions, was resolved to give no encouragement to Juliana, but to show to the utmost of his power that he was proof against all her blandishments and endearments. She herself, throughout this quadrille, was particularly guarded,—the only indication of tenderness which she bestowed, being the pressure of the hand—but not even a significant look, nor a sigh, nor a whis-

per did she vouchsafe. She appeared to converse only with the courteous and easy politeness which a young lady might be expected to observe towards a young gentleman with whom she was but very slightly acquainted. After the quadrille—and while promenading round the room—she bethought herself of a dozen different expedients to obtain five minutes unobserved and unrestrained discourse with Frank: but Mr. Hawkshaw was there—and she dared not risk the danger of exciting his suspicions by accompanying the youth a second time into any secluded place. The moment arrived when he must conduct her back to her seat; and as they were proceeding thither, she hurriedly whispered to him, "If we do not find an opportunity to converse presently, you must meet me to-morrow, soon after mid-day, in the Castle garden, at the same spot where we met yesterday."

Frank made no reply. Indeed, if he had wished to give one, he could not: for by the time Juliana had finished speaking, they were too near the spot where Lady Saxondale was seated for him to do otherwise than make his bow, leave Juliana there, and turn away to another part of the room. Again did Mr. Denison accost him: they joined a group amongst which was Mr. Hawkshaw; and there they stayed conversing for some time. Frank refused to dance any more; and he accordingly remained altogether with his friend the Squire, until supper was announced. Then Hawkshaw proceeded to conduct Juliana to the banquetting-room. Mrs. Denison requested Frank to escort a young lady, to whom she introduced him for the purpose; and when seated at the table, there was a considerable interval between himself and Miss Farefield. We need scarcely observe that the repast was of the most sumptuous description, or that the hospitalities of the host and hostess were administered in the most cordial manner.

After supper the party began to break up: for it was now two in the morning—and in the country, where the guests have frequently long distances to go on their return home, these entertainments are seldom protracted until as late an hour as in the metropolis. Juliana found no opportunity of saying another word to Frank in private upon this occasion—a circumstance at which he was very far from being displeased.

Ere he and Mr. Hawkshaw took their departure, Mr. Denison said to the Squire, "Remember that you and our young friend are to dine with us to-morrow."

CHAPTER CI.

MR. DENISON.

FRANK slept till a very late hour: for he was much wearied with the excitement of feeling as well as with the festivities through which he had passed. Indeed, it was close upon eleven o'clock when he descended to the breakfast-parlour. Mr. Hawkshaw had been for a long ride, and had eaten his first breakfast on his return home: he however sat down to table to commence a second one when Frank made his appearance.

"We are to dine with the Denisons this evening," said the Squire. "Perhaps you would do well to write a letter to your father, and inform him that you will not be home for a day or two?"

"I could have wished to return to London to-day," replied Frank; "only that it would be most ungracious not to accept Mr. Denison's very kind invitation."

"Ah! you would like to quit Lincolnshire to-day?" said the Squire: then, with a laugh, he added, "And have you really no inclination to visit Gainsborough and see that lady of whom you spoke to me?"

Frank felt that he was blushing, and scarcely knew what reply to give; but Mr. Hawkshaw seemed so busy with the viands as not to notice his young guest's confusion.

"Why should you think," asked Frank, after a pause, and endeavouring to laugh also, "that I am desirous to see that lady again?"

"Because, my dear Paton," responded the Squire, "it would only be consistent with the weakness of human nature if you did entertain such a desire. Besides, you are so young—so inexperienced——"

"However," interrupted Frank, speaking with the firmness of a fixed resolve, "I have made up my mind that I will *not* see that lady again."

"And you act very wisely," rejoined Hawkshaw. "Now, take my advice, my dear young friend—for so I am sure you will permit me to call you: shun that lady, whoever she may be, as if she were a reptile. I have been thinking very seriously over all you have told me—because the more I see of you, the more I am interested in you; and I should be very sorry to think that you were ensnared or entrapped by such a base, heartless, intriguing creature. I don't know much of the female sex: but this I do know—that such a woman as the one you have described to me, must be capable of any sophistry, hypocrisy, and dissimulation, in order to carry a point. Therefore, if you give me the assurance that you do not intend to use any exertion to see her again, it will be taking a weight off my mind."

"My dear Mr. Hawkshaw, I cannot thank you sufficiently," responded Frank with grateful fervour, "for the kind interest you take in my behalf. I should be unworthy indeed of such a generous friendship, if I did not give you the pledge you ask. And that pledge I do give you, solemnly and sacredly!"

The Squire shook Frank's hand in the most warm-hearted manner: he even wrung it with effusion;—and then he hastened to observe; "The truth is, my young friend, if I thought that you were at all inclined to throw yourself again in the way of that syren, whoever she may be, I should not consider myself justified in keeping you at the Hall another minute. Much as I should regret to lose you so abruptly, it would be my duty to urge your speedy return to London. However, you have given me the pledge—and I am satisfied. I must now inform you that my friend Denison last night took an opportunity of telling me that he received a letter from your father, who is a very old friend of his. Your father, as I already know from your lips, is preserving an *incognito*,—he enjoined the strictest secrecy to Mr. Denison—and Mr. Denison has not violated it. He did not tell me therefore who your father is; and of course I did not seek to know. Stop! do not tell me that secret, Frank! I would rather not

learn it at present. When you return to London and inform your parents that you have formed the friendship of blunt George Hawkshaw, you can then, with their permission, write and tell me whatsoever you may have to unfold. In the meanwhile you are a welcome guest here; and I hope that the friendship which has thus commenced, will last throughout our lives. And now for the amusements of the day."

"Yesterday, Mr. Hawkshaw," observed Frank, "you denied yourself the pleasure of paying a visit to your intended bride; and from all that I noticed, you did not see her last evening at the ball——"

"Oh, you sly dog!" ejaculated the Squire, with a loud and somewhat boisterous laugh: "you were looking out—were you—to see if I paid particular attention in any quarter?"

"No, Mr. Hawkshaw," was Frank's quick response; "I am incapable of undue curiosity. But what I meant you to infer was, that I did not see you pay any such particular attention: for if you had, I could not have failed to observe it. Taking it for granted, then, that you did *not* see your intended bride last night, I cannot possibly think of being so selfish as to engross you all to myself. Therefore you must pay your accustomed visit—and I shall indulge in a ramble through your beautiful grounds."

"No, my young friend," replied Hawkshaw, smiling: "I do not mean to leave you to yourself, or throw you so completely on your own resources. I have already despatched a note which will leave me free to remain altogether with you. So now, if you please, we will take a scamper and shake off the effects of last night's dissipation."

There was no possibility of offering any farther remonstrance to the good-natured Squire's plan of proceedings; and Frank accordingly suffered him to have his own way. In respect to writing to his father, he said that this would be unnecessary, as he must positively start for London on the ensuing morning. The horses were saddled: he and the Squire rode forth—and several hours were passed in the same manner as on the preceding day. At four o'clock they returned to the Hall to dress for dinner; and a little before five the old-fashioned carriage was in readiness to take them to Mr. Denison's. On arriving there, they received the kindest welcome from their host and hostess, by both of whom Frank was especially made much of. It was a small party, the other guests consisting only of some of Mr. Denison's own family.

In the course of the evening Mr. Denison took an opportunity to conduct Frank into his library; and there, making him sit down, he said, "My young friend, I have to repeat the question I put to you last night: whether there be any way in which I can serve you? You saw the letter which your esteemed father wrote; and you must speak to me with the same confidence as if you were addressing him. Banish all reserve—I am not disposed to be a harsh or severe Mentor——"

Frank felt that it would be most ungracious towards his father's old friend if he did not show him at least the same degree of confidence which he had placed in Mr. Hawkshaw; and he accordingly proceeded to give him precisely the same details as he had already narrated to the Squire, still suppressing Juliana's name, and still making it appear as if the lady of whom he spoke was temporarily residing in the town of Gainsborough. Mr Denison listened in silent attention: he did not speak a word until Frank had finished; and when the youth had done, he appeared to reflect profoundly for some time.

"Now, my young friend," he at length said, speaking gravely and solemnly, but still with a truly paternal kindness, "you will follow the advice of one who is old enough not merely to be your father, but your grandfather. Avoid this woman as the mariner would a rock on which his vessel must inevitably suffer shipwreck: avoid her as if she were a moral pestilence! You are too young, and your life is too full of brilliant hope, for you to sacrifice yourself to such a shameless profligate. Am I not giving you the advice which your revered father would proffer, were he present on this occasion?"

"You are, my dear sir—you are," responded Frank, seizing the old gentleman's hand and pressing it warmly. "I have already pledged myself to Mr. Hawkshaw that everything shall be at an end between that lady and myself: I renew the same pledge to you!"

"It is well," rejoined Mr. Denison; "and I am gratified with this evidence of your sincerity. But there is still something more that you must do: and now I am again counselling you as if it were your own father who in his loving care was proffering his best advice. That woman—for it is scarcely possible to call her a lady after all you have told me—will not leave you unmolested: she will take the earliest measures to obtain an interview with you—and for your own sake you ought not to incur the risk of being drawn within the magic circle of her charms. Therefore, my young friend, let me entreat you to take a bold and decisive step, which shall at once put that woman to confusion."

"What would you advise, sir?" asked Frank.

"I would advise that you write a letter, telling her that you have penetrated her character—that you look with loathing and abhorrence upon the woman who could make up her mind to become the wife of an honourable man, merely for the purpose of deceiving him, and using the sanctity of the marriage-state as a cloak for a guilty connexion with a paramour. This would I do, my dear Frank; and in the name of your father I enjoin you to adopt the course which I recommend. There are writing-materials—pen the letter at once—and entrust it to me for delivery."

Frank started, and gazed upon Mr. Denison with a kind of vacant bewilderment. Was he aware, then, who the lady was that formed the subject of conversation? had he seen or heard anything on the previous evening to make him suspect the actual truth? or did he mean to inquire presently the name and address of this lady?

"My young friend," said Mr. Denison, looking grave and serious, "I know more than you have imagined—or perhaps not more than you at this moment suspect. The female who has degraded the sex to which she belongs—who beneath a brilliant exterior nourishes the most detestable passions—and whose beauty serves but as a disguise for her vices—that foul creature is Lady Saxondale's daughter, Juliana Farefield!"

Frank made no immediate observation. He did

not choose to deny an assertion which Mr. Denison had made with the positive manner of one who was neither speaking on conjecture nor at random: and yet, on the other hand, the youth was loath to admit that his secret had been rightly read.

"No matter, my young freind," continued Mr. Denison, "how I have made this discovery: you perceive that I am better informed than perhaps you at first imagined. But the topic is evidently too painful a one to be dwelt upon at unnecessary length. Follow my advice—pen a letter in the sense I have suggested—and leave the rest to me."

The youth felt that Mr. Denison was speaking to him with the same authority with which his own father would have spoken, and with an equal amount of true paternal kindness. He therefore hesitated not to obey the suggestion he had received; and placing himself at the writing-table, he took up a pen. But when he had written the first line he felt totally unable to proceed: his ideas were rapidly falling into confusion—and he was at a loss for the most fitting language wherein to shape the document.

"Suffer me to prompt you as to what you ought to say," observed Mr. Denison: and as Frank acquiesced, the old gentleman proceeded to dictate a letter couched in terms of the most cutting severity.

"Do you not think that this is going somewhat too far?" inquired Frank, presently stopping short.

"Would you use delicate language and mincing phraseology towards a creature of such a stamp?" demanded Mr. Denison with something like sternness in his accents. "Understand me well, Frank—I wish you to write such a letter that Miss Farefield, notwithstanding all her effrontery, will never dare molest you again. Indeed, if she possesses one single spark of pride, she will endeavour to banish you from her thoughts."

"But is this generous," asked Frank, "towards me who has perhaps loved me?"

"Love!" ejaculated Mr. Denison. "Desecrate not the term by using it in such a sense. Is it possible that you can endeavour to blind yourself to the full extent of Juliana's profligacy? No: I think too well of you to entertain such an injurious opinion."

"Proceed, sir—proceed," said Frank: "I am in your hands."

Mr. Denison continued the dictation of the letter; and in a few minutes it was brought to a conclusion.

"Now," he said, as he locked it up in his desk, "we will return to the drawing-room."

"But one word more, my dear sir," said Frank. "Mr. Hawkshaw—is he to be made aware of all this? Does he already know as much as yourself? In a word——"

"Mr. Hawkshaw," interrupted the old gentleman, "will not, I think, speak to you any more upon the subject: and you yourself will scarcely revive it in his presence. To-morrow morning you are to start for London: and much as it would please me to see more of you on the present occasion of your visit into Lincolnshire, I cannot, in justice to your own interests and to my friendship for your father, counsel you to prolong your stay."

Mr. Denison and Frank now retraced their way to the drawing-room, where coffee was served up. An hour was then passed in agreeable conversation upon various topics; and soon after ten o'clock the Squire's carriage was announced to be in readiness. Having taken leave of the kind-hearted Denisons, Frank accompanied Mr. Hawkshaw back to the Hall; and on the following morning he took his departure for London. But he did not separate from the Squire without expressing his fervid gratitude for the hospitality he had received,—coupled with the assurance that he should write to him with the briefest possible delay.

But in the meanwhile, what were Juliana's thoughts and feelings in respect to Francis Paton? It will be remembered that the last words she had spoken to him on the night of the ball, consisted of a hurriedly whispered entreaty that he would meet her in the castle-grounds on the ensuing day. Shortly after breakfast one of Mr. Hawkshaw's servants arrived at the castle, with a note from his master, addressed to the Hon. Miss Farefield. It was couched in affectionate terms, and besought her to excuse him from paying his wonted visit that day, as his young guest had claims upon him which, in the true spirit of hospitality, could not be violated. Juliana, on the receipt of this note, foresaw that Frank would not be enabled to keep the appointment she had given him. If the Squire remained in constant companionship with him, he could not possibly find an opportunity to come such a distance as that between the Hall and the Castle. Juliana was profoundly vexed and annoyed at this disappointment: but she nevertheless went to stroll in the gardens at about mid-day with the faint hope that Frank might yet possibly come to her. The time passed—and still he appeared not. The day went by; and not the slightest attempt was made on his part to obtain an interview with her. She thought to herself that on the morrow he would be sure to come: for she argued that Mr. Hawkshaw must surely have some business to attend to, of some kind or another, that would leave Frank his own master for a few hours. Not for an instant did she suspect that anything prejudicial to her schemes was taking place: nor did she apprehend that after all that had occurred between herself and the youth at the Denisons', he would be in a hurry to leave Lincolnshire.

This was the second day after the ball: it was the one on which Frank had departed in the morning. The hour of noon came—and Juliana again walked alone in the garden. She kept near the spot where Frank had so suddenly appeared in her presence three days back: and wistfully did she gaze through the foliage in the direction by which she thought he would come. But he came not. Presently she heard footsteps approaching along the gravel-walk behind: those footsteps were at once recognized—she knew them to be Mr. Hawkshaw's. Having, as the reader is aware, made up her mind to keep the two strings to her bow, she suddenly put on her brightest looks, and sped to meet the Squire with every appearance of affectionate delight.

"Well, Juliana," he said, after the wonted embrace, "I suppose you did not think to receive another note of excuse from me to-day?"

"Certainly not," she replied: "it would have been too unkind—almost unpardonable:"—and she bent upon him a look in which love's beams appeared to kindle. "I know very well that a guest has claims upon one: but still one must not forget the claims of others—at least not altogether."

"Rest assured, Juliana," rejoined Hawkshaw, "that even if Mr. Paton *had* remained at the Hall to-day, I should have flitted away from him for an hour or two to visit the Castle."

"Ah! then your young friend is gone?" said Juliana, scarcely able to conceal her mingled astonishment and vexation at this announcement; but the next moment it occurred to her that Frank, though having quitted the Hall, had probably remained in the neighbourhood in a secret manner, as the only means of being enabled to find an opportunity of obtaining an interview with her.

"Yes," observed Mr. Hawkshaw, carelessly; "he has returned to London. My own lumbering carriage took him as far as Lincoln—and he is now no doubt journeying rapidly homeward."

"You soon lost him," said Juliana, not knowing indeed exactly what she did say; for the hope which she had formed, suddenly died within her—and she could scarcely doubt any longer that Frank had really left Lincolnshire.

"Yes—he was anxious to get back to his parents. And natural enough—as he has only so recently discovered them. By the bye, dear Juliana, you have not told me yet what you think of him? Is he not a very nice young man?"

"Oh! he is a mere boy—almost a child."

"Well, call him a boy, if you like," responded the Squire, laughing. "Do you consider him a nice boy?"

"My acquaintance with him was so short: I merely danced with him twice, you know."

"True! But one soon forms an opinion of persons. For my part, I like him exceedingly: he is an amiable and generous-hearted youth—much inexperienced in the world, however."

"Necessarily so," observed Juliana: "because he is so young."

"Last evening we dined at the Denisons'."

"Ah! and Mr. Paton was with you, then? I am sure that if he had remained any longer in Lincolnshire, my mother would have been delighted to have shown him every attention as a friend of your's—because you know, my dear George, that every friend of *your's* will always be welcome at Saxondale Castle."

"Thank you for this assurance, my dear Juliana. And now," continued the Squire, assuming a more serious tone, "I am going to ask you a very singular question: but I will soon explain my motive."

"Indeed! a singular question?"—and a queer feeling that bordered upon alarm, though she scarcely knew why, flitted across her brain: so true is it that a guilty conscience is ever a fertile source of apprehension.

"Yes—it may seem singular—but I hope not impertinent:"—and the Squire appeared to hesitate.

"How strangely you are talking, George!" cried Juliana, fixing upon him a keen penetrating look: but she read nothing in the honest open-hearted countenance of Mr. Hawkshaw to warrant her apprehensions.

"Well then," he continued, "I will come to the point. Are you aware, Juliana, whether the day for her ladyship's nuptials with Lord Harold Staunton is fixed? or what arrangements her ladyship proposes to make with regard to the ceremony?"

"I have not yet heard. My mother is somewhat reserved towards me upon those matters:"—and Juliana experienced a great relief when she thus discovered what the topic was that Mr. Hawkshaw had prefaced with a somewhat alarming degree of mystery. "The truth is," she added, in a confidential tone, "my mother perhaps feels that she is about to take a step that the world may consider ridiculous or impolitic—marrying a man so much younger than herself——"

"Oh! but if people consult their own happiness," exclaimed Mr. Hawkshaw, "they may defy the opinion of the world."

"And yet you, my dear George, shrink somewhat from announcing to your acquaintances our engagement? But perhaps," added Juliana, as if quite in a careless manner, "you have mentioned it to one or two? I dare say, if the truth be known, you told it to Mr. Paton——"

"No: on my honour I did not!" responded the Squire emphatically. "Did not you yourself the other night counsel me at the ball not to make it the subject of any confidential communication?"

"Yes—I recollect. But wherefore did you ask me just now those questions concerning my mother?"—and again did Juliana gaze penetratingly though furtively upon the Squire's countenance.

"I was only thinking that since I have received your assent to the proposal which I was venturous enough to make you, my dear Juliana, I might next solicit you to fix the day which is to render me so happy—Oh! so happy—I cannot find words to express my feelings! But in proffering such a request, it occurred to me that much might depend on Lady Saxondale's own arrangements. Probably it would be suitable for the two marriages to take place at the same time—unless her ladyship be desirous that her own nuptials should be celebrated first. Tell me, Juliana—am I too bold—am I too presumptuous—in expressing a hope that you will not long delay the period which is to render me so happy?"

"I will speak to my mother to-day," answered Juliana, affecting to bend down her eyes in confusion: but at the moment the thought which was uppermost in her mind, was the necessity of communing seriously with herself, in order to arrive at a positive decision how she intended to act.

"Do—I beseech you—speak to her ladyship to-day," urged Mr. Hawkshaw.

"But our engagement has been so short," murmured Juliana. "It is but three days since you honoured me with the offer of your hand——"

"True, dearest Juliana: but are we not old acquaintances? have we not known each other for years? Pardon me for being thus urgent! The world need not know how long or how short our engagement may have been. Come, Juliana—let me not hear any scruples from those sweet lips of your's. Recall not your promise that you will speak to your mother this afternoon! Wherefore should the happy day be unnecessarily postponed? Convinced as I am of the sincerity of your affection to me—and judging the extent of it by my own—— But am I in error, Juliana, to speak thus trustfully—thus hopefully?"

"Oh! how can you question me thus? do you doubt my love?"—and the artful young lady gazed up with every appearance of earnest tenderness into the Squire's countenance.

"No, no, Juliana—not for a moment do I doubt your love: and therefore you will not unnecessarily postpone the day of our nuptials. This is the hour when your mother is least likely to be engaged. Go and seek her at once. I have business that calls me to Gainsborough; and therefore I shall take my departure. To-morrow, when I call, may I hope, Juliana, that I shall receive from your lips——"

"I understand you, my dearest George," responded Juliana, murmuringly. "Since you wish it, the day shall be fixed."

"Then farewell for the present—farewell, dearest Juliana!"

Having embraced the young lady, the Squire sped to the stables, where his horse had been put up without the saddle or bridle being taken off; and mounting the splendid animal, he rode away from Saxondale Castle.

Juliana, instead of hastening to seek her mother, continued to walk in the garden. She not only felt the necessity, as already stated, of pondering seriously upon the course which she ought to pursue: but she thought it still just possible that Frank might have remained in Lincolnshire. Perhaps she might see him presently? perhaps it was after all only a stratagem on his part to escape from Hawkshaw Hall? and perhaps he had accepted the Squire's offer to use the carriage as far as Lincoln in order to lull that gentleman into the belief that he was really serious in speeding back to London? But if Frank should *not* come, what was Juliana to do? Oh! if he had deserted her—if he had abandoned her—should she endeavour to hate him as much as now she loved him? and should she marry Mr. Hawkshaw with the least possible delay?

Hour after hour passed; and still was Miss Farefield walking in the garden. Frank made not his appearance: the faint hope which had still lingered in her heart, waned away; and at length it died within her. It was now close upon five o'clock; and if he had stayed in Lincolnshire, he would have seen her by this time. Her pride was hurt—her feelings were wounded in their utmost sensitiveness. Nevertheless, she did not hate the youth: it was easier to think of hating him than to bring her mind to that point. The passion she had experienced for him was still too absorbing—too engrossing, to permit such a sudden change of sentiment. But what step could she take to communicate with him? She knew not where he dwelt in London: she knew not who his recently discovered parents were. Besides, even if she were well acquainted on these heads, there was no time: for Mr. Hawkshaw was now pressing that the nuptial day should be named.

Suddenly an idea struck Juliana. She *might* name the day to accompany Mr. Hawkshaw to the altar—she might postpone it for a month; and in the meantime she could adopt some course in order to communicate with Frank. She herself could not proceed to London on any pretence; because Lady Saxondale would not accompany her, and it would be exposing her mother to scandalous surmises—indeed, to the downright loss of reputation—to leave her alone at the Castle with Lord Harold Staunton. Therefore Juliana must make up her mind to remain likewise at the Castle; and whatever course she adopted in respect to Frank, must be pursued by means of correspondence. But how to discover his address? That was the question. Perhaps he would write? perhaps he had been recalled to London by a sudden communication from his father? perhaps he himself was at that very moment suffering much affliction on her account? For she could scarcely conceive that after what had taken place between them in the conservatory, he had suddenly surrendered her altogether. Was he not about to yield to her arguments and her entreaties at the moment when Mr. Hawkshaw made his appearance in the conservatory? were not his lips about to breathe the word which was to crown her triumph? Surely, then, he had not the power to shake off the influence of her spells within so brief an interval, and in so abrupt a manner? Juliana still loved him—still longed for him—still craved to have that beautiful youth entirely to herself; and she was not the woman likely to abandon a hope that was cherished or a project that was formed.

In the course of the evening she spoke to her mother upon the subject which Mr. Hawkshaw had named to her. Lady Saxondale reflected for some minutes; and then answered in the following manner:—

"It is quite certain, Juliana, that your marriage with Mr. Hawkshaw cannot take place *first*: because it would be impossible for you to leave me alone at the Castle with Lord Harold. Already perhaps there is some little indiscretion in his remaining here after the departure of his aunt and sister: but still it would be over-scrupulous and punctilious for any one to affirm that a lady with a grown-up daughter and a host of domestics at her residence, may not have a male guest staying with her—especially when he is about to become her husband. Thus far therefore we may conclude that no harm is done. But it would be monstrously indiscreet for me to remain with him here alone. Therefore your marriage cannot take place first. Nor can our's: because, as we must proceed somewhere to pass the honeymoon——" and Lady Saxondale could not help smiling bitterly as she thus spoke——"you on your side would have to remain here alone at the Castle. That also would be imprudent, with a suitor visiting you. Therefore, all things considered, the two marriages had better take place at the same time. One fortnight hence do I purpose to bestow my hand on Lord Harold Staunton."

"One fortnight?" ejaculated Juliana. "The time is brief, mother."

"I do not choose to prolong it," was Lady Saxondale's answer.

"Ah! I understand!" said the daughter maliciously: "you are in a hurry to obtain the name of a wife with the least possible delay, so that in case of an accident, you may not have that of a mother again too soon?"

Lady Saxondale became scarlet, and sprang to her feet from the chair on which she was sitting: then, with a withering look, she said in a tone hoarse with rage, "Take care, Juliana, that *you* don't become a parent too soon to be agreeable to Mr. Hawkshaw."

With these words her ladyship quitted the room; and proceeding to another, threw herself on a chair and wept in very spite and rage. Yes: the proud and haughty Lady Saxondale—the strong-minded woman,—gave vent to her wrath in tears,—tears which she could not possibly restrain! How she hated Juliana at that moment!—hated her far more intensely than during the time of those scenes which were wont to take place between them at Saxondale House previous to the visit to Lincolnshire!—hated her indeed with a malignity that seemed to crave for a bitter vengeance! For some time past there had been no angry words nor expression of ill-feeling between the mother and daughter: but now that ill-feeling was all revived again—and Lady Saxondale wept because her rage was so impotent.

She leant forward; and resting her elbows upon a table, buried her face in her hands, actually groaning in spirit. Oh! if she could but fly to some far-off clime, away from the theatre of her machinations and intrigues—away also from a land where there were those pitfalls which she herself had digged with her own hands, and into any one of which a single false step would precipitate her ——But no: it was impossible!—she must remain in England to carry out her views—to accomplish her destiny. The door opened; and Lord Harold Staunton entered the room. Lady Saxondale did not immediately perceive him: he advanced straight up to the chair in which she was seated—and with a kind of angry impatience, said, "Well, what is the meaning of these tears?"

Still Lady Saxondale continued unaware of his presence: she was so profoundly absorbed in her own distressing thoughts, that though he had spoken loud enough, she actually did not hear him.

"What is it, I say? what is the matter with you now?" he demanded. "A pretty prospect for our married life!" he added bitterly: and then Lady Saxondale looked round.

Quickly wiping away her tears, and composing her features with a remarkable suddenness, she said in a cold tone, "How long have you been standing there?"

"But a few moments. Perhaps you were talking aloud ere I entered the room, and were saying things that you would rather should not meet my ears?"

"No: I am not aware that I was musing aloud. But surely, Harold," she continued, with accents of cold irony, "you do *not* expect our marriage state to be characterized by happiness?"

"Happiness—no!" exclaimed the young nobleman bitterly; and a ghastly expression of anguish swept over his countenance. "Happiness indeed! what happiness can there be for either of us again in this life? Would to God that I had never known you! would to heaven that I could recall the past! I was a rake—a spendthrift—a good-for-nothing extravagant fellow, a short time back; and yet I was happy. But from that fatal moment when *you* cast your spells around me, my peace of mind has been destroyed—never to be given back again!"

"And pray, my lord," inquired Lady Saxondale, fixing upon him a cold reptile-like look, "in what strange mood is it that you have sought me now for the purpose of telling me all these things? It is literally childish to pretend for a moment that I had the power to persuade you to do certain deeds, unless the readiness and the inclination were already in you."

"Silence, woman!" ejaculated Staunton: "you are a fiend in the most glorious guise! I have been enamoured of your beauty - it still dazzles me—and there are even moments when it enchants me: but nevertheless I loathe and abominate your character. What have I become? Dare I look inward? No, no! Dare I even look the world in the face? Scarcely!—for in every one I meet, methinks I behold an accuser."

"Harold, for heaven's sake hush these wild words!" said her ladyship, now becoming really frightened. "You know not who may overhear them—the walls have ears——"

"But tell me, tell me, Harriet—I command and conjure you," interrupted the young man, speaking like one distracted: "is the secret positively safe? does not Juliana suspect it? Why does she look at me so singularly at times, and with a certain malice in her regards? Ah! methinks that there are moments when she also has that wicked look which I have sometimes caught upon your countenance,—not the wicked look of sensuality,—but a look that seems to be the reflection of a soul capable of any mischief—a look as if a devil were gazing out of your eyes."

"You are mad, Harold, to talk in this strain," interjected the lady vehemently. "The reason why Juliana sometimes regards you in a strange manner, is because she has fathomed our intimacy. Perhaps she may have watched when you have sought my chamber at night——But it is of no consequence how she has made the discovery: suffice it for me to inform you that it *is* made; and if when you entered the room ere now, you beheld me weeping, it was with rage and fury because Juliana had given me to understand a few minutes before, that our amour was known to her."

"Then you assure me that the *other* secret is safe?" said Harold, experiencing some slight feeling of relief. "But you do not know," he continued, in a vacant and abstracted manner, "why I could not accompany you to the ball at the Denisons' the night before last. It was because I liked not to meet that man Hawkshaw."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, with a looked of unfeigned surprise. "And wherefore should you have liked not to meet him? how has he offended you? Methought you were excellent friends."

"Friends! Yes—good friends enough—there is no reason we should be otherwise. And yet," proceeded Harold, still in a nervous and abstracted manner, "I have been haunted by a strange presentiment with regard to that man. The other day—it was the one before that on which the ball took place—he paid but a hurried visit to the Castle, if you remember. In short, it was the day he proposed to Juliana, as you told me. Well, he came up to my room to bid me good bye—he saw my pistol-case——"

"Enough, Harold—enough!" interrupted Lady Saxondale, flinging around her frightened glance: then, approaching her countenance close to that of the young nobleman, she said in a l w hoarse voice, "Fool that you are to continue talking in this strain! If ruin overtakes you——*us*——it will be your fault!"

"Heaven forbid!" groaned the wretched Harold: and he shuddered visibly from head to foot. "But I *must* tell you about Hawkshaw's visit to my room ——Why has he kept away so much for the last two or three days—indeed, ever since *that* day?" demanded Staunton abruptly. "There is something ominous in it!"

"Nothing of the kind," answered Lady Saxondale: then with a tone and look which savoured somewhat of contempt, she said, "Are you a man thus to conjure up images of terror to haunt yourself withal? Hawkshaw has been here to-day—he is the same as ever—he has pressed Juliana to name a time for their nuptials. They will take place the same day as our own a fortnight hence. Mr. Hawkshaw did not call for two days because he had a friend staying with him. And now, Harold, you must exert more courage——"

"Courage!" he ejaculated: "it is an almost superhuman courage that I am constantly exerting to put on the outward appearance of composure. But it does not always serve me! The other day—when Hawkshaw spoke of the missing pistol—I felt that I grew white as a sheet—that all the blood had suddenly stagnated in my veins——Ah! it was a hideous, a horrible feeling that seized upon me at that moment! Harriet, but a short time back, when I was a gay rollicking fellow about town, I laughed at the idea of conscience: I believed not that there was one within me. But now I know that there *is*—and a conscience, too, capable of inflicting the stripes of a scorpion-scourge! Oh! there are moments when I feel as if I should go mad! I have become a being of strange contradictions—tossing hither and thither upon the wildest and most tumultuous sea. Sometimes I adore your beauty—I feel that no sacrifice was too great to possess you: at other times I hate and abhor you with the strongest loathing——"

"At all events you do not disguise the truth,"

observed her ladyship, with some degree of bitterness. "But listen, Harold. Is it I who are forcing you to become my husband? is it not you that are forcing yourself as a husband upon me?"

"Yes!" he ejaculated, suddenly grasping her robust but splendidly modelled arm with such violence that his fingers closed around it as if they were an iron vice: "I *do* force myself upon you as a husband;—and beware how you attempt to deceive me! beware how you endeavour to thwart me! What? all these crimes to go unrewarded! No, by heaven! if I have waded through the Red Sea a sea of blood—it was for the purpose of gaining the land of promise! I longed to possess you: I succeeded. I longed for an established social position; and I must obtain it. Now do you understand me?"

"I have understood you all along," answered Lady Saxondale; "and I tell you, Harold, that if you will only exercise proper caution—if you will summon all your courage to your aid, so as to meet valiantly and even defiantly these regrets and remorses which have crept upon you—and if in future you will avoid giving utterance to your feelings, even when you believe yourself to be unheard and unseen—I will do *my* best to soothe you! You tell me that I am handsome: I will use all my blandishments to make you happy. Only you *must* exercise caution: for an unguarded look—a single word let drop—may bring the thunderbolt of ruin upon the heads of us both."

"Yes—there is reason in your words," said Harold, slowly and thoughtfully: "and I must endeavour to exercise a greater mastery over myself:"—but as he thus spoke, an expression of bitter anguish again swept across his countenance.

CHAPTER CII.

THE TWENTY-FIRST OF AUGUST.

It was the 21st of August, and the clock in Solomon Patch's boozing-ken was striking seven, as Madge Somers entered the place. The very instant she crossed the threshold, it struck her that the old man and his wife suddenly exchanged singular and even sinister looks as they caught sight of her: but as they both alike addressed her the next moment with their accustomed friendliness of manner, she fancied that she must have been mistaken. Passing round into the bar-parlour, she beckoned Solomon to follow her; and when they were alone together, she said, looking very hard at him, "Is anything wrong?"

"Wrong? no! What made you think so?" he at once exclaimed.

"Only because it occurred to me that you and your wife exchanged rapid looks of meaning as I entered the place."

"Ah! it was because we'd been a wondering whether you would come or not—and whether you was really serious in expecting to get that information as you wanted."

"Serious?" observed Madge: "and how could you think I was otherwise? Did I not leave fifty pounds in your hands? and did not that prove that I was serious enough?"

"To be sure, to be sure!" responded the old man. "The fifty pounds is all right, and is forthcoming."

"If I had not been able to put confidence in you," rejoined Madge, "I should not have trusted you with the money. And now tell me—have you heard any one talking about the business? and do you think that there will be a claimant for the fifty pounds?"

"I ain't heerd say nothing partickler about it," answered Solomon: "on'y I know that Tony Wilkins and some others has been on the look-out—but whether they've learnt anything or no, I hav'n't heerd tell. Howsumever, they hav'n't forgot that this is the evening you was to be here; and me and my wife had just been saying we wondered as how whether you would come, when the door opened and you made your appearance. That's why we looked at each other as you saw us do."

"Well, and about another matter," observed Madge. "I have not been able to come here since that night——you know what night I mean——"

"To be sure—the Cannibal's affair:"—and old Solomon placed his finger in a sly manner against the side of his nose. "I rayther thought you might be keeping out of the way on purpose——"

"Not I indeed! What was there to keep out of the way for? I have been engaged I may say day and night in this same search on which I have set others—and all in vain on my part! But have you had the curiosity to peep down the well again? or have you been prudent enough to have the stones cemented over, and the trap-door above nailed up? In short, have you had carpenters and bricklayers to put your house to rights again?"

"Yes—completely," responded Patch. "It's pretty well the same as it was afore."

"And have there been many inquiries after Chiffin?" was Madge Somers' next question. "But no doubt there have. What have you said in answer to them?"

"Oh! not much. He hasn't been missing long enough for people to begin to wonder. It is but a week since the thing took place. But what will you have—brandy, beer, or wine?"

"Some beer and some cold meat—nothing else. I shall remain till eight o'clock; and then I must be off, whether I get the information or not. I have an appointment to keep at nine on the other side of the Regent's Park,—and it will take me an hour to get there."

Solomon Patch went forth into the bar to draw some porter for Madge's behoof—while his wife, to whom he mentioned her wishes, proceeded to serve her with the supper she had ordered; and again did the two old people exchange significant looks. But this time Madge, who was in the parlour behind the bar, observed them not.

She ate and drank; and by the time her repast was over, it was half-past seven o'clock. She looked very much annoyed, and gave utterance to several ejaculations of impatience: for she began to fear that the reward she had offered would find no claimant on the part of any one giving her the information she required. Ten minutes more passed away—it was now twenty minutes to eight; and she was just thinking to herself that her hope was certain to be disappointed—when Solomon Patch suddenly entered from the bar, where he had been

serving liquor; and the woman at once saw by his look that he had something to communicate.

"Here's a cove as wants you, Madge," he said; "and though he hasn't told me, I think it must be for the business you're come about. And he's got some one with him."

"Who is it?" demanded Madge impatiently.

"Here's the genelman to speak for his-self," answered the landlord: and the next moment Bob Shakerly entered the bar-parlour.

He was followed by a man of even a greater age than his own, and who was well clad, having altogether a most respectable appearance. Madge started up from her seat; and gazing upon this person in a scrutinizing manner, seemed to be considering whether his features were at all familiar to her. But they were not.

"Sit down, my friend," said old Bob Shakerly to the individual whom he had thus brought with him; "and don't speak a word till I tell you. Now, Madge," he continued, addressing himself to the woman, "is it all right about the blunt?"

"Are you prepared to claim it?" she inquired, again looking at the stranger, as if more than half-suspecting who he would prove to be.

"I am," rejoined Shakerly. "Come, Solomon, produce the bank-notes—and then I'll out with what I have to say."

"Is it to be so?" asked the landlord, appealing to Madge.

"Shakerly," she at once said, "I have no time to lose. Is this Mr. Thompson that you have brought with you?"

"It is," was the answer given by the old knacker.

"One word—and only one word, said Madge; "so that I may assure myself that this is no trick on your part, Shakerly, to get possession of the money."

"Rest assured, my good woman, whoever you are," said Mr. Thompson, now breaking the silence which he had hitherto maintained; "that I would not become a party to any fraud or dishonesty. I do not even know what all this means."

"Just one word in your ear, Mr. Thompson," exclaimed Madge; "and then I shall know at once that it is all right."

"Well, only one word," interposed Bob Shakerly: "for you can't have your information, whatever it is you want, before the blunt is safe in my pocket."

"Your friend Solomon Patch has got it," rejoined the woman; "and therefore you can have no fear of receiving it. Mr. Thompson, a single word in your ear:"—and bending down so that her repulsive countenance well nigh came in complete contact with his venerable though care-worn one, she said in a low whispering tone, "If you were once the manager of a company of players, can you recollect the name of a man and his wife, having two children, who were in your troop, and concerning whom you are acquainted with some particular secret?"

"Ah! I know whom you mean—it strikes me at once!" answered Thompson, speaking louder than Madge herself had done.

"Hush!" she immediately interjected. "Whisper the name in my ear."

"Deveril," he replied, uttering the word in a subdued voice according to the intimation he had just received.

"Enough," said Madge, with an air of satisfaction: then turning to Solomon Patch, she added, "You can pay your friend Shakerly the money. Now go out into the bar together, and drink a bottle of wine at my expense. I must have ten minutes' conversation with Mr. Thompson here."

The old landlord and Bob Shakerly accordingly went forth from the bar-parlour, closing the door behind them. The former speedily produced the bottle wherewith the woman had bade them regale themselves; and he invited Shakerly to follow him into the tap-room, where they could drink it together at their ease, and in the companionship of a pipe. But old Solomon Patch did not instantaneously light his pipe, nor begin drinking his share of the wine. He took out a letter from his waistcoat-pocket, tore off the blank half of the sheet, and hastily wrote the following lines thereon:—

"maj be hear. shee comed punktal 2 the time. she should say as how she have gott a pointmint at nine t'other side of regency park. i raythor wonderd u didn't as how cum but spose you thort itt best to kepe out of the way til u heerd what dodge she was up 2 so as i prommessed i've sent thes fu lines to lett u no."

Having completed this precious scrawl, Bob Shakerly folded it up in such a manner that its contents might not be read by the messenger to whom he purposed to entrust it; and then he carefully sealed it, stamping the wax with a farthing which he took from his pocket. This being done, he glanced round the room, where about a dozen persons were assembled; and singling out Tony Wilkins, beckoned this individual into a corner.

"So you hav'n't got the fifty-pound prize, young chap?" he said in a whisper.

"I've tried hard for it, though," was the response; "but you might as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay, as arter that feller Thompson with such a precious little information as Madge could give about him. I suppose she's here—bain't she?"

"Yes—but no matter. If you hav'n't got the fifty pounds, I'll give you half-a-guinea to make you some amends. But you must cut off at once with this here note; and mind and don't show it to nobody. You can guess who it's meant for—cos there's no address on the kiver."

"Enough—I understand," responded Wilkins, and taking the note he put it into his waistcoat-pocket: then having received the promised reward, he sped away to execute the commission entrusted to him.

Solomon Patch, having thus sent off his emissary, seated himself next to old Bob Shakerly; and while helping himself to wine,—and a precious compound Solomon's wine was too,—he said to his companion, "How come you to be so fortunate as to light upon this chap Thompson and get the fifty pounds?"

"It was all a accident," responded the knacker: "and when I got up this morning, I no more thought of the bit of luck that was going to tumble in my way, than that you was a likely chap to make me a present of a hundred pound yourself."

"Well, I don't think I be wery likely to do that," observed Solomon, with a humorous grin. "But how came this luck to happen?"

"In the first place, old friend," answered Shakerly, "you must remember that I was up here at the *Goat*, smoking my bakker, ten days or so back, when Madge Somers come in and told all the folks

what she wanted done, and put the fifty pounds into your hand. Well, I went away, thinking little of it: for I wasn't going to waste my time in looking arter chaps of the name of Thompson—it was more to my account to chop up horse-flesh to supply them nice sassages which the pastry-cooks puts in their rolls. But to come to the pint. Last night a pal of mine told me as how he and another chap was going to do a bit of resurrection-business, and wanted to know whether I would dispose of the stiff 'un for them amung my connexion. Well, you're aweer, Sol, I don't do much in that there line now: but when a job does tumble in my way, I don't mind turning a honest penny or so by undertaking it. Well, I promised I would make the inquiry. So this evening—a little arter five o'clock—I dresses myself up in my best clothes, as you sees me now—and I toddles up to the West End of the town, to call on a certain Dr. Ferney, a genelman which patronises the harts and sciences—more partickly the noble hart of body-snatching—which was the way I first come to know him. Lord bless you! I've knowed Dr. Ferney a long while——"

"No doubt, Bob. But don't spin your story out so," interrupted Solomon. "Well, you goes up to this Dr. Ferney——eh?"

"I does. He hangs out in Conduit Street, 'Anover Square," continued the old resurrectionist. "Of course I goes round to the back-entrance; and I'm showed into a back parlour on the ground-floor, where a respectable old genelman was reading a book. The doctor wasn't there at the time; and it was the fault of the servant that I was showed into that room. Well, presently in comes the doctor his-self; and the moment he sees me, he knows my business is partickler; so he says to this venerable-looking old file, 'Mr. Thompson,' says he, 'just have the kindness to leave us alone together for a few minutes.'—Thompson indeed! At that there name I all in a moment recollects what Madge Somers had said: but then the thought struck me that there was a many Thompsons in the world, and I'd no call to be sapparised at meeting with one on 'em now and then. Still I don't know what it was—curiosity perhaps—but at all events, summut—that made me say to that old genelman, 'Beg pardon, sir, for the impertinence; but you don't happen once to have been the manager to a troop of players?'—Mr. Thompson, who was just going to leave the room, turned round short, looked at me uncommon hard, and then said, 'I don't know who you are: but you evidently appear to know me. I *was* once—and indeed for a very long time—in the position you have mentioned.'—Now, Sol, my limbs isn't wery active: on the contrairy, they're rayther shaky: but I cut a double caper on hearing them words, for I felt that Madge's fifty pounds was as good as in my pocket. So I begged Mr. Thompson not to leave the room for a minute or two: and then I told him there was a woman who was uncommon anxious to see him, and who was looking for him all over the world. He of course axed me what the woman wanted, and all about it: but I couldn't tell him nothing, for I didn't know nothing myself: but I said it was wery important, and I thought was summut to his own advantage. I'd often seen that bit of gammon stuck in newspaper advertisements; and I thought it would make him all the more ready to come along with me. Well, I raised his curiosity and after a consultation with Dr. Ferney, Mr. Thompson agreed to accompany me. So while he went up-stairs to put on his shoes and coat—for it seems that he is living in the house, and had on slippers and a dressing-gown at the time—I axed the Doctor if he would like to have the stiff un; but the Doctor rayther declined, as he didn't much like summut that happened about the last one he had of me. That was a woman named Mabel Stewart——"

"Well, never mind who it was, Bob," interrupted Solomon. "Mr. Thompson agreed to accompany you, you was a-saying."

"Yes: but when I brought him up into this part of the town, he didn't very much like it. Howsumever, I got him into the place: and what's more, I have sacked the reward. Now, I mean to say there's many a chap which writes romances that hav'n't never hit on a more singular coinci-dence"——with a strong emphasis on the *i*——"than this here."

"Very true, Bob," rejoined the landlord, refilling the glasses. "But I say, hav'n't you an idea of what it is that Madge wants with this Mr. Thompson? I wouldn't mind giving summut to know: for depend upon it there's money to be turned by it—or else Madge Somers wouldn't be giving herself all this trouble and shelling out her blunt into the bargain. I 'spose Thompson his-self had some suspicion of what was wanted of him; and of course you pumped him as you come along together?"

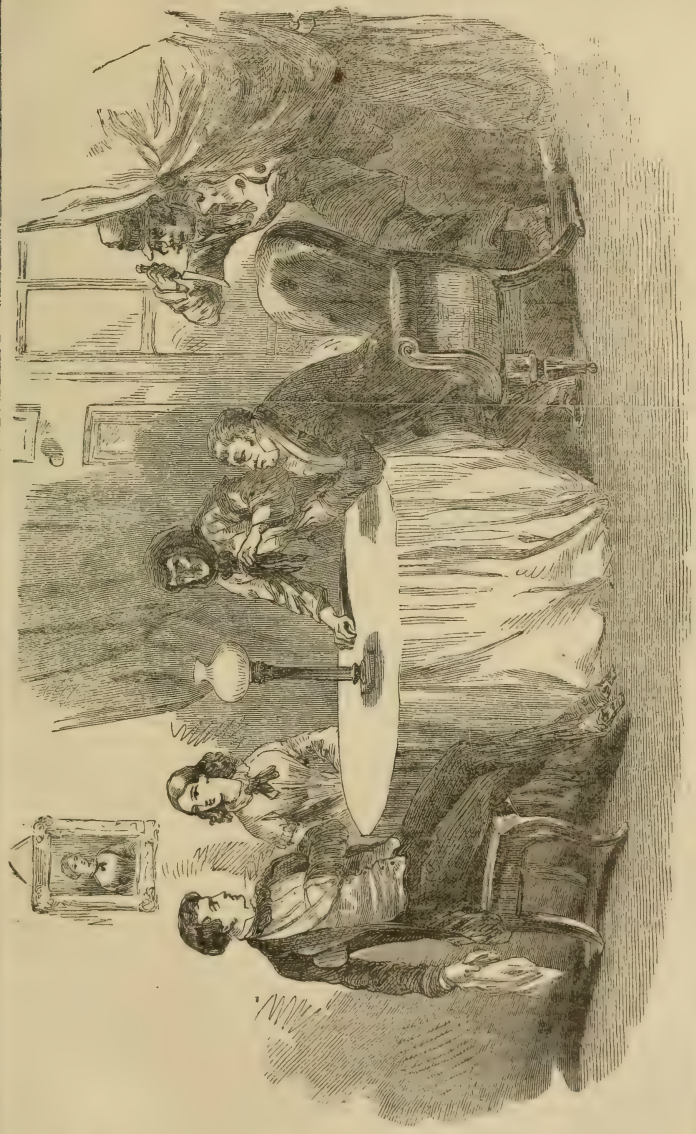
"There was nothing to pump," answered old Shakerly. "Thompson had no more idea what Madge Somers wanted with him, than the man in the moon. Quite t'otherwise: he seemed to think that I *must* know summut of the business, and that it was rayther odd I wouldn't tell him: but he talked the best part of the time in praise of Dr. Ferney, who, it seems, has been an uncommon good friend to him. In fact, Thompson said that if it hadn't been for the doctor he should have perished. What he meant, I don't exactly know——But I say, if you are so anxious to find out what Madge wants with him, why don't you go and listen a bit?"

"It's too late now," answered Solomon. "Depend upon it their conversation is precious near over: for Madge has got an appointment to keep at nine t'other side of Regency Park. It's now past eight, and she'll be going in a few minutes."

At this moment the potboy entered the room, and said in a low voice to Solomon Patch, "Madge Somers is gone; and that there gentleman which is in the bar, wants me to show him the way to the nearest cab-stand: for he's quite a stranger in these parts."

"I'll go and speak to him," answered Solomon: and leaving old Bob Shakerly to finish the wine, he issued from the public room.

Mr. Thompson had in the meanwhile emerged from the bar-parlour, and was now standing near the door of the boozing-ken, waiting for the potboy to conduct him out of the maze of Agar Town. Solomon—putting on his hat—volunteered, with his wonted hypocritical civility to serve as the old gentleman's guide to the cab-stand at King's Cross. As they proceeded thither, Solomon did his best to extract from his companion the nature of the business for which Madge Somers had so anxiously sought him: but Thompson, plainly discerning the land-



lord's object, dexterously evaded the questions thus put; and Mr. Patch returned to his establishment no wiser in that respect than when he had issued forth.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE VILLA.

It was not forgotten at William Deveril's abode that this was the evening on which that strange woman whom he had rescued from the Trent, and who in her turn had saved his life and that of the Marquis at the boozing-ken, was to pay him a visit. Lord Eagledean dined with William and Angela on the present occasion; and as the young maiden was no stranger to her brother's affairs, she speculated with as much anxiety and interest as William and the Marquis themselves, as to what would be the result of the interview that was expected.

They were all three seated in that same front parlour on the ground-floor which has been alluded to in a previous chapter. The evening was exceedingly sultry; and the casement, which reached down to the floor, stood partially open: but the curtains were drawn over it inside; and the lamp was burning upon the table.

"We have been speaking," said the Marquis, after a brief pause in the conversation, "altogether of the expected visit, to the exclusion of other topics: but two or three times I was on the point of observing that with regard to our adventure of the other night——"

"Ah, that dreadful night!" murmured Angela, with a shudder: "what a providential escape! I had a presentiment of evil – I dreaded lest some treachery should be intended——"

"And yet who could have foreseen it?" said the Marquis. "But I was about to observe that the longer and the oftener I reflect upon the incident of that night, the more I am convinced that the wretched woman who had already sought to work you so serious an injury, William, was the instigatrix of that stupendous treachery."

"Lady Saxondale!" said our young hero. "Yes, my lord, circumstances do indeed too plainly point to her as the employer of that dreadful man who so righteously met his doom—fearful though it were!"

"It *could* have been none other than Lady Saxondale," observed the Marquis. "Who else could be interested in getting rid of both of us at the same moment? And then too, we had previously received proofs that she was in correspondence with that man. Moreover, his employer must have been some one whose proffered bribe far outweighed whatsoever amount of money the miscreant might have hoped to get from us. Yes, Lady Saxondale—and Lady Saxondale *alone*—was the instigatrix of that diabolic crime!"

"And has not your lordship as yet taken measures," inquired William, "to wean away Lord Harold Staunton from the dreadful companionship of Lady Saxondale?"

"Not yet—not yet," replied the Marquis. "What measures could I take? Did we not expect some startling revelations from Chiffin? and was it not all a snare to plunge us into destruction? In respect to the complicity of Lady Saxondale therein, we ourselves may be convinced of it—but we could not establish the charge against her: we have no evidence of its truth. If we were to accuse her of hiring or engaging a detestable bravo to take our lives, she would boldly and indignantly deny it. But the time cannot be far distant when her character must be fully exposed: it is impossible that deeds so foul as her's can long be enacted without involving her in ruin. This woman who is coming to-night, will perhaps have revelations to make in connexion with the fearful incident in Agar Town. If she could but furnish us with positive proofs that the villain Chiffin was employed by Lady Saxondale, it would be all we should require to serve the twofold purpose in view: namely, to rescue my nephew from the power of that evil genius who has cast her spells around him—and to compel her to give the most signal contradiction to the calumny which she has so basely propagated, William, relative to yourself. But, ah! methought I heard the garden gate open."

"Doubtless it is the woman," observed Angela, glancing towards a time-piece on the mantel: "for it only wants two minutes to nine o'clock."

Silence now prevailed in the parlour, the three occupants of which were plunged in a state of considerable suspense. A single knock—but given somewhat imperiously—was heard at the front door: the female servant hastened to answer the summons; and just as the time-piece began ringing forth, with its silver notes, the hour of nine, Madge Somers made her appearance.

"I am punctual," she said, in her terse abrupt manner: and without ceremony she took a chair.

When thus seated—with her face towards the Marquis of Eagledean, Angela, and Deveril—her back was towards the half-open casement which the curtains covered.

"Yes—you are punctual," said Lord Eagledean; "and as you may suppose, we are all three profoundly anxious to learn what you have to communicate. This young lady," he added, glancing towards Angela, "is Mr. Deveril's sister."

"Ah! his sister, eh?" observed Madge, with a singular expression of countenance: but as it immediately passed away, and her looks resumed their usual harsh and rigid aspect, she said, "I told you, William Deveril, that I would meet you here at the expiration of a month—day for day and hour for hour—from the time when the appointment was given in Lincolnshire. I have kept my word. But of what avail would it be for me to boast this punctuality, unless in the meantime I had discovered him whom I vowed to seek for?"

"Thompson?" ejaculated our hero, with a sudden start that denoted the feverish anxiety which galvanized him at the moment. "And have you found him? have you been successful?"

"Assuredly," answered Madge: "or else wherefore am I here? Did I not assure you that if he were still in the land of the living, I would find him out—and that if he were dead I would obtain proof of his decease? But he *is* alive—I have discovered him. Scarcely an hour has elapsed since I parted from that man whom I have thus so unweariedly sought."

"Then the secret which I imagined to have died with my poor father, is now known to you?" said

Deveril, with increasing anxiety and suspense—a feeling that was fully shared by his sister and the Marquis.

"This secret was known to me all along," replied the woman curtly. "I merely sought a corroboration from the lips of him who, after all you told me in Lincolnshire, I felt assured could furnish it."

"And this secret—my poor father's secret?" exclaimed our hero. "Oh! keep me not in suspense——"

"Do not excite yourself, young man," interrupted Madge. "I am not going to run away in a moment—nor perhaps for an hour. Indeed, we have much to talk about. But you speak of your father—of him who died in Italy——"

"And who was so kind and excellent a father to us!" ejaculated William, taking Angela's hand and gazing affectionately upon her countenance, as he thus referred to the tender care which she as well as himself had received from the late Mr. Deveril.

"Your father—humph!" observed Madge, in so singular a manner that the eyes of all three were concentrated upon her in a moment. "Now, William Deveril," she continued, "if I have not at once entered upon the object of my visit—if I have not rushed eagerly into those explanations which you are naturally so anxious to receive—and if I still feel it necessary to indulge in a few prefatory words, it is because the secret I have to make known is one of such importance——"

At this instant the curtain which covered the casement, suddenly flew aside and a man rushed in. A shriek thrilled from Angela's lips, while cries of horror burst from those of the Marquis and our hero: for the bright blade of a dagger or clasp-knife which the intruder held, gleamed above the head of Madge Somers. She half-started from her seat, as that sudden rush from behind and the cries of alarm from those in front, simultaneously smote her ears: but ere a single syllable issued from *her* lips, the weapon was driven deep down into her shoulder, and she fell like a weight of lead upon the floor. The next instant the assassin was gone.

All this was the work of a moment—a single moment. The man had no sooner made his appearance than the blow was stricken, and he vanished like a spectre. Had his person been previously unknown to Deveril and the Marquis, they would have been utterly unable to give the slightest description of it: but the impression which seized upon them both at the instant, was that he was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

Angela flew to raise up the unfortunate woman—the Marquis rushed to her assistance—and the next moment William Deveril, without his hat—without a weapon of any kind, dashed through the open casement and sped in pursuit of the murderer.

"She breathes! she is not dead!" cried Angela, who with her own hand had extracted the knife from the wound, and with her kerchief was endeavouring to staunch the blood which welled forth in a torrent the instant the weapon was withdrawn.

The servants, who had been alarmed by the cries which had reached their ears from the parlour, now made their hurried and frightened appearance; and they were stricken with dismay on beholding the terrific spectacle. But Angela, who in this awful crisis preserved all her presence of mind, bade them assist her in laying the woman upon the sofa—while the Marquis, hurriedly inquiring where the nearest surgeon dwelt, sped away to procure his assistance. During his absence everything was done that could be thought of to arrest the flow of the vital current; and when the medical man arrived in company with Lord Eagledean, he at once approved of the measures thus adopted.

The woman lived; but she was entirely unconscious of what was going on. The surgeon examined the wound, and expressed his belief that it was not mortal, but that little short of a miracle could prevent it from proving fatal. Angela at once decided that Madge Somers should be taken care of at the house, and not removed elsewhere: for whither could she be removed, save to a hospital or a workhouse? those who surrounded her, being utterly ignorant of the place of her abode. But not for an instant did the generous-hearted Angela entertain any other idea than that the unfortunate woman should be cared for beneath that roof; and she assisted her servants to convey her as gently as possible to a bed-room up-stairs. The medical man did all that was requisite on his side, and took his departure, with a promise to call again at an early hour in the morning.

It must not be thought that either Angela or the Marquis had omitted to notice the abrupt pursuit which William Deveril undertook after the assassin; and while an almost frantic terror had for an instant seized upon the young lady, the direst apprehensions took possession of Lord Eagledean, at the thought that William might meet his death, unarmed as he was, at the hands of the desperate Cannibal. But, as we have seen, their own goading alarms did not prevent either the magnanimous young lady or the generous nobleman from doing all in their power on behalf of Madge Somers: and it was not until the surgeon had taken his departure that they had a moment's leisure to express to each other the sore misgivings they felt with regard to our hero. He had now been absent nearly an hour; and Angela's terrors became torturingly poignant. The presence of mind which she had preserved as long as it was needed to enable her to minister to the wounded woman, totally gave way; and, half frantic, she was rushing forth without bonnet or shawl to look for William. But the Marquis, holding her back, conjured her to compose herself,—vowing that he would undertake the search. At the very instant, however, that the nobleman was on the point of issuing from the villa, our young hero made his appearance, breathless and exhausted—his dress in disorder—his hat battered—his garments dusty—and with every indication of having gone through some desperate struggle.

But Angela beheld not at the moment these evidences of a conflict. Wild with joy at William's safe return, she flew into his arms and covered him with kisses; then the Marquis of Eagledean proffered him his congratulation in his turn; and as William asked hurriedly concerning the wounded woman, Angela and Lord Eagledean now noticed the plight he was in. The young lady was once more seized with terror lest he should have sustained some injury: but he speedily reassured her on this point; and then in reply to his own queries, she made him aware of all that had been done in respect to Madge Somers.

"Not merely because she is a fellow-creature," said William Deveril,—"nor merely because she saved his lordship and me from the pitfall prepared for us, must she be ministered unto and surrounded with the most assiduous attentions: but likewise because her life is indeed a most precious one so far as I am concerned. For it is but too evident that she is acquainted with some secret of the utmost importance nearly and closely concerning me."

"Rest assured, dear brother," said Angela, "that she shall receive all possible care."

"I know it—I know it," exclaimed William quickly: "do not think, sweet Angela, it was a hint I conveyed—it was merely a remark which circumstances called forth."

"You are right, William," observed the Marquis, thoughtfully and even solemnly: "that woman is indeed acquainted with some secret of vital import to your interests:—otherwise she would not have so carefully prepared you as it were for the revelation she was about to make. But what it could be, defies the possibility of conjecture."

"But you, my dear brother—you are sinking with exhaustion!" exclaimed Angela. "You are overwhelmed with fatigue! Recline yourself upon the sofa; and let me give you some refreshment."

The amiable girl proceeded to mix some wine and water, which she presented to William; and he drank the beverage with avidity. He then proceeded to relate all that had occurred during his hour's absence from the villa.

"You saw how I precipitated myself after that murderous villain: but on reaching the gate I paused for a few moments to ascertain if I could catch the sounds of retreating footsteps in any direction. I could hear nothing. The thought occurred to me that the assassin would scarcely proceed in the direction of London, but would rather make for the open country. With this impression I bounded away along the last-mentioned route; and the excited state of my feelings lent wings to my feet. I found myself almost flying: I was astonished at my own speed. In a few minutes my ear caught the sound of footsteps ahead. Swifter and swifter became my pace; and the ruffian—for it was he—finding himself pursued, suddenly stopped short. The next moment we were face to face. It was in a lonely part where we thus met. With one glance the fellow appeared to assure himself that I was unarmed: he drew a pistol from his pocket—but quick as lightning, I sprang aside and the bullet whizzed past my ear. Then I seized upon him; but he broke away from me with the power of a giant—indeed with such force, that I was whirled round and thrown against a fence. He rushed away with a savage yell resembling that of a wild beast, and in a few moments his footsteps were lost in the distance. Again I sped onward: for never in all my life had I experienced such a boiling rage. For at least a quarter of an hour I hurried along without knowing whether I was on the miscreant's track, and without reflecting that even if I overtook him, the conflict between us would be most unequal, not merely because he had probably other weapons about him, but likewise on account of his infinitely superior physical strength. No—in the hurry of my thoughts and the excitement of my feelings, I was unconscious of danger—or indifferent to it; and on I went. But at the expiration of the quarter of an hour that I have named, and on reaching a still more lonely part than that where I had first overtaken him, I came up with the villain again. He was now crouched up under the shade of a tree, and evidently waiting to spring upon me as I passed: but fortunately the gloom of that place was not so deep but that I caught sight of the assassin's form—and he did not therefore take me at a disadvantge. It is certain that he had not another loaded pistol, or he would have fired it: but with the butt-end of the one he held in his hand, he levelled a terrific blow at my head. I caught his arm as he thus sprang towards me; and he fell backwards. I threw myself upon him; and it must have been an almost preternatural power that possessed me at the moment: for I wrenched the pistol from his grasp, and holding it above his head, threatened to strike him with it unless he remained quiet. Then I cried for assistance: but none came. A desperate struggle ensued: the villain in his turn tore the pistol from my hand—but instantaneously recovering it, I thus prevented him from dealing me a blow that would probably have been fatal. He tried to wrench it again from me; and I flung it to a distance. Assassin as he is, I did not like even in my rage to strike him with that weapon. It now appeared to be a struggle of life and death between us—or rather I should say on my part: for if he had mastered me, never should I have left that place alive. Loudly did I continue to call for succour; and still none came. For several minutes did this frightful struggle last: but fortunately the whole time I remained uppermost, with the villain lying under me. At last I felt my strength going: it was impossible for me to keep in that position any longer;—and if the conflict were continued, I should have become his victim, instead of having the satisfaction (as I at first hoped) of securing him as a prisoner. With one tremendous effort he succeeded in disengaging his arms from the grasp which I had maintained upon them during all the latter portion of the struggle: and then, to prevent myself from being thrown underneath, I sprang up to my feet. Quick as lightning he did the same; and taking another pistol from his pocket, he held it by the barrel as he sprang towards me with the fury of a tiger. My hat had fallen off in the conflict; and if the butt-end of that weapon had dealt the blow which the miscreant levelled at me, it would doubtless have killed me on the spot. The sudden sense of this new danger resuscitated all my energies in a moment: I closed with him again—again too did I succeed in wrenching the pistol from his grasp: but at the same moment it fell from my hand. He broke away from me—stooped down snatched up the weapon—and in the madness of his rage, hurled it at me with all his force. Fortunately I escaped this last attack; and the pistol fell into a hedge. The ruffian now took to his heels and fled precipitately. I still pursued him, continuing to cry for assistance: but I overtook him not again. Wearied and exhausted, I sat down to rest for a few minutes; and then made the best of my way homeward."

Angela shuddered as she thus learnt the dangers from which Deveril had escaped, and the magnitude of which he had by no means exaggerated.

The Marquis of Eagledean now took his leave,

promising to return on the morrow and see how the wounded woman got on. In the meanwhile a nurse, whom the medical man had undertaken to send, arrived at the Villa; and to her special care was Madge Somers consigned. She passed a somewhat more tranquil night than could have been expected under the circumstances; and when the surgeon called in the morning, he was enabled to pronounce a still more favourable opinion than he had delivered on the previous evening. That is to say, he entertained a strong hope of the woman's ultimate recovery. But she continued speechless, as well as unconscious of where she was—of what had happened —and indeed of all that was passing around her; and the medical man in reply to Deveril's anxious questions, stated that many days must elapse—perhaps even weeks—before she would recover the power of utterance.

Soon after breakfast, the Marquis of Eagledean made his appearance, accompanied by Frank. He and Deveril then consulted together as to the necessity of giving information to the police-authorities of the murderous outrage which had been perpetrated. It did not suit their purposes to enter into particulars relative to their previous acquaintance with the villain Chiffin; and yet, on the other hand, it was clearly impossible to keep justice in ignorance of the crime that had been committed. It was accordingly agreed that Deveril should repair to the station-house, and give information of the circumstances of the assault, together with the fullest description of its perpetrator. The inspector of police, to whom this communication was made, instantaneously recognized Chiffin the Cannibal from the portraiture that was drawn of him; and he promised Mr. Deveril that no time should be lost in setting the officers of justice upon the search.

Having transacted his business at the station-house, our young hero returned to the Villa. The Marquis of Eagledean took an opportunity of speaking to him alone; and he now for the first time communicated the object of Frank Paton's recent journey into Lincolnshire. William Deveril was astonished to hear of the youth's unfortunate attachment for Juliana Farefield: but he congratulated the Marquis on the escape which his son had experienced from being entangled in the wiles of a young woman whose morals were evidently so loose and whose character was so unprincipled.

"Although Frank," said Lord Eagledean, "yielded to the advice of a very conscientious friend—I mean Mr. Denison—and renounced for ever all idea of accompanying Miss Farefield to the altar, yet it has not been without a pang that he has resigned himself to this decision. His own good sense convinces him of the propriety of the step: but his young heart, naturally affectionate, cannot put away from it in a moment an image which had made so deep an impression upon it. He is therefore in a somewhat desponding state of mind; and methought that a little change of scene, and the companionship of kind friends, would tend to cheer his spirits. I therefore proposed that he should pass the day with you. It is not necessary that your sister should be acquainted with all the past in respect to my son's unfortunate love for Juliana Farefield: but I am sure that you will both do your best to cheer him as much as possible."

"If he would stay with us a week or a month, instead of a single day," replied Deveril, "he would be most welcome."

"I know it—I know it, my young friend," responded the Marquis. "We shall see. Frank can do as he likes in the matter. And now I must bid you farewell for the present: for I intend to go and consult my solicitor anew in respect to the course which ought to be adopted on your behalf in respect to Lady Saxondale."

Lord Eagledean took his departure; and Frank remained at the Villa. In the middle of the day William Deveril repaired to Cavendish Square to pay his usual visit to his beloved Florina; and Frank was left alone with Angela. The amiable young lady saw that the lad was not altogether in the best possible spirits; and though she knew not the cause, nor thought fit to inquire, she exerted herself with the most ingenuous affability to amuse and cheer him. She showed him her drawings—she likewise opened William Deveril's well stored portfolio—she played several pieces on the piano—and she walked with him in the garden. The youth could not possibly help contrasting the elegant simplicity and natural good-temper of Angela's disposition with the artificial and deceptive character of Juliana Farefield: so that he soon began to take pleasure in the society of his fair companion. By the time Deveril returned from Cavendish Square, —and his visit thither on this occasion was short, as he did not think it kind to absent himself too long from home on account of his guest,—the latter had recovered much of his wonted cheerfulness; and the evening was passed most agreeably. It having been left to Frank's option how long he would stay at the Villa, he made but little difficulty in yielding to William Deveril's invitation to pass a few days there: for our hero felt himself to be under such signal and manifold obligations to the Marquis, that it rejoiced him to be enabled to show any attention to his son. Frank did therefore remain: and during the week which he thus spent at Deveril's abode, his walks with Angela were not confined to the garden—they were extended to the Regent's Park. The more he saw of this young lady, the less regretfully did he look back upon the loss of Juliana. Not that he could immediately banish the latter from his memory—or that he all in an instant fell head over ears in love with Angela Deveril: but it was impossible that the companionship of so sweet, so amiable, and so charming a creature could do otherwise than exercise a gently soothing influence over his wounded spirit. And then too, on the score of beauty, Angela was incomparably superior to Juliana Farefield. The latter was voluptuously splendid and sensuously dazzling: but the former was of a pure etherial loveliness which appealed only to the sentiment, and refined instead of provoking the grosser feelings of the heart.

At the expiration of the week Francis Paton returned to Stamford Manor: and his parents, as well as his sister, were rejoiced to perceive that a marked change had taken place in his spirits. In the course of the day on which he thus came back to the paternal abode, he and Elizabeth walked out alone together in the grounds; and after some conversation on indifferent topics, the lady observed with a sly and furtive look at her brother, "Perhaps my dear Frank, you will yet find that there are

women in the world as handsome and as captivating as Juliana Farefield,—and certainly more virtuous."

"What do you mean, Elizabeth?" asked the youth quickly; for as he glanced towards his sister, he caught upon her handsome countenance the half-vanishing expression of archness which had been conjured up thereon by the thought that was uppermost in her mind at the moment.

"Nothing particular, dear Frank," she responded: "only that I suppose you do not purpose to devote your life to cynical regrets for the loss of Juliana? Depend upon it," she added, more seriously, "it is no loss—but a very fortunate escape for you. A young woman who could have proposed that when she was married to another, you should remain as her pensioned lover——"

"Enough, Elizabeth! do not speak of it!" interrupted Frank. "There is something dreadful in the mere contemplation of such depravity. Besides," he went on to observe, without exactly knowing that he was giving audible utterance to his musings, "after having passed a week in the companionship of the pure-minded and virtuous Angela Deveril, it is impossible not to be struck with the contrast which she presents to Juliana Farefield."

"Ah! then you think that Angela is infinitely Juliana's superior?" said Elizabeth Paton, without looking at her brother as she spoke.

"It is impossible to think otherwise!" he exclaimed, with a degree of fervour that conjured up a smile to his sister's moist red lips; but she did not suffer Frank to perceive that his observation had made any particular impression on her.

"And the beauty of Angela?" she remarked, as if quite casually and in a purely gossipping strain: "do you think she is equal to Miss Farefield?"

"She is superior—incomparably superior!" rejoined Frank, still with an unconscious fervour in his accents. "But why do you question me thus, Elizabeth?" he suddenly asked, as a suspicion of her motive flashed to his mind.

"Because, my dear brother," she answered gaily, as she turned her beaming countenance upon him, "you are already as much in love with Angela Deveril as ever you were with Juliana Farefield; and therefore your case is not very hopeless—and I do not think you will die of disappointment, or forsake the world and turn hermit, on account of your disappointment in Lincolnshire. But, Ah! there is Diego!"

With these last words Elizabeth Paton flitted away from her brother, and sped to join the handsome Spanish nobleman, who had at that moment entered the grounds.

Francis thus remained alone at some distance from the mansion, and in the vicinage of that shady avenue of trees where we once before saw him walking on the occasion that he waited for his sister to bring him the decision of their parents in respect to his suit with Juliana Farefield. He stood still for some minutes, struck with the last speech which Elizabeth had made ere quitting him. Her words were to him a revelation of the changing condition of his own mind; and at length he said to himself, "Is it possible that in one short week Angela Deveril could have made this impression on me?"

He wished to analyse his feelings—to dissect his thoughts—to commune with himself. He advanced farther along the avenue—he reached a gate in the palings at the extremity—he issued forth, and continued his ramble along a shady lane. So absorbed in reflection was he, that he did not perceive himself to be the object of attention on the part of a man who was loitering near. Yet such was the case. This individual was a respectable-looking and decently dressed person, of middle age, but with a sharp cunning countenance. As already stated, he he surveyed Francis Paton with attention; and at length muttered to himself, "Yes—this must be him!"

At this moment the youth caught sight of him; and observing how the man regarded him with interest, Frank looked at him in a way calculated to encourage him to speak, if such indeed were his object.

"You are Mr. Paton, I presume?" said the stranger: and on receiving an affirmative response, he at once produced a letter, which the youth took.

"Miss Farefield's writing!" ejaculated Frank: and his first impulse was to give it back to the hand from which he had just received it.

"No, sir—I cannot take it again," said this individual. "I beg that you will read it—I have come all the way from Lincolnshire to look for you. Indeed, I have been searching after you for some days past; and now that I have succeeded in finding you——"

"Did Miss Farefield send you? and how did you find me out?" demanded Frank, suddenly interrupting the stranger. "Tell me also who you are?"

"Softly, sir—I cannot answer too many questions at once. First of all, I must inform you that I am the brother of Lady Saxondale's steward on the Lincolnshire estate; and my name is Woolman. Miss Farefield, knowing I am trustworthy, sent me on this little errand; and she told me I was to be particular in seeing you alone—and only to give this letter into your hand."

"Well—but how did you find me out?"

"I will deal frankly and candidly with you, sir," responded Woodman. "Miss Farefield knew that you had a sister who passed by the name of Mrs. Chandos—or at least used to do—and who had a cottage somewhere in the neighbourhood of Tottenham. So I went to that cottage: but the woman there did not like to tell me anything about you. It was only this morning, on paying her a second visit, that I succeeded on some pretext in getting any information at all: then she told me that I might perhaps hear of you at Stamford Manor——"

"And do you know to whom Stamford Manor belongs?" demanded Frank quickly: for it now struck him that probably his father's *incognito*, which he still preserved, might not have been so well sustained as his lordship thought.

"I have heard it belongs to a Mr. Gunthorpe," answered Woodman: and there was nothing in his look or his manner to make Frank suspect that he was acquainted with anything more.

"But about this letter," said the youth: "I cannot take it—I cannot read it——no, I must not!"—and yet he could not help feeling somewhat anxious to know what Juliana had to communicate: it was that feeling of curiosity which naturally resulted from all the love he had borne her and all that had passed between them.

"Mr. Paton," said Woodman, assuming a solemn demeanour, "it is of the highest possible consequence that you read that letter. Miss Farefield, expecting that perhaps you would hesitate, enjoined me to tell you that it may be the last she will ever have to write to you—and, in short, there is something to be submitted for your decision——"

"Then, in that case," interrupted Frank, "I will read the letter:"—and he said to himself, "There will be no harm; for whatever she may say, will not alter the decision to which on my part I have already come."

He accordingly broke the seal, stepped aside, and read the letter, the contents of which ran as follow:—

"I know not in what terms I ought to address you. You fled precipitately from Lincolnshire, notwithstanding the appointment I gave you; and you have not written to me a single word of explanation. This is not well done on your part. Remember that when you were but a humble and obscure youth—and that is but a few weeks ago—I treated you as my equal: I gave you my love—I encouraged you to believe that you were not destined to be what I found you; and you thanked me in enthusiastic terms for those words that were a solace to your soul. You recently put me to what you considered to be *a test;* and if I had agreed at once to wed you, you would have joyously assented. What then is my fault? That having no fortune of my own, I could not bring my mind to take a step that should drag you down into the depths of poverty; and that in the ardour—or I may call it in the *frenzy* of my love—I suggested a course which though unjustifiable upon a moral ground, was nevertheless the alternative to which hope alone could fly. And it is for this I am abandoned! for this that I am discarded! The immensity of my affection is made a source of woe, and sorrow, and bitterness to myself!

"But there is another subject to which I must direct your attention. Did I follow my mother's example in scorning you on account of your sister's criminality? No: far from it. When I discovered the ground upon which Lady Saxondale sent you forth from the mansion in Park Lane, I upbraided her bitterly for her conduct; and when you appeared before me the other day in the Castle-gardens, I received you with open arms—I thought not the worse of you on your sister's account. In this therefore, as in all other respects, Frank, have I given you signal proofs of my fervid and devoted love. Cannot *you* therefore, forget and forgive one little error on my part? can you not attribute to the strength of my attachment that proposition which appears to have shocked you so much, but which was made in the moment of my heart's profound despair?

"And now, Frank, after having thus appealed to you for the last time, I require your decision. Is everything to be at an end between us? or shall the past, in so far as I have offended, be forgotten and forgiven? Your prompt reply is necessary. Delay not: or, if after a little while you should repent your decision and wish to seek me again, it will be too late!

"One word more, Frank. I have no doubt you are acting under the guidance of your newly-found parents, whoever they may be: but parents are not always the best counsellors—or at least their advice is not always compatible with the promptings of their children's hearts. Think you that my mother, for instance, would have looked kindly upon my love for you at the time that it commenced? Would she even *now*—(no matter how altered your circumstances may be)—after what you *have* been, and considering what she knows of your sister? And yet I have been all along prepared to sacrifice everything to my love for you. Can you sacrifice nothing for me? Go to your parents—throw yourself at their feet—tell them that your happiness is bound up in me—and they will yet consent to our marriage. They must be kind hearted, or they would not even have consented that you should put me to the test for which purpose you came into Lincolnshire. At all events send me your prompt decision—whether everything is at an end between us, or not? The bearer of this missive is trustworthy; and immediately upon receiving your answer, he will set off on his return into Lincolnshire. Frank, I conjure you not to achieve the unhappiness of one who loves you tenderly and well!

"Your affectionate,
"J. F."

To say that Frank Paton was not moved by this epistle would be to speak incorrectly. He *was* at first much moved; and he even thought within himself that his conduct had been too harsh and severe—his judgment relative to Juliana too stern and implacable. He could not help feeling that there was much truth in many passages of her letter; and when he had finished reading it, he remained standing on the spot to which he had stepped aside—reflecting profoundly. But gradually the conviction that this was only a well studied piece of sophistry—the craftily worded appeal of a designing woman—stole into his mind: and then too, as gradually and as slowly, arose up before him the image of Angela Deveril, like a good genius with outstretched hand to draw him away from the brink of destruction. His resolve was taken; and rending the letter into the minutest fragments, he tossed them away.

"What answer am I to bear back, sir?" inquired Woodman, now accosting the youth. "Doubtless you purpose to write your reply—and I will remain here until you bring it to me."

"No," returned Frank: "it is unnecessary. Tell Miss Farefield that I abide by the result of the test—and she will understand you. More I need not say."

With these words Francis Paton turned abruptly round—hurried up the lane—and was speedily lost to the view of the emissary from Lincolnshire.

But as the youth retraced his way towards the Manor, one circumstance almost more than any other engrossed his thoughts and filled him with perplexity and bewilderment. That letter which he had written at Mr. Denison's, and under this gentleman's dictation—had not Juliana received it? He could scarcely think so: for it was worded in a strain so cutting—so humiliating—that it was impossible to suppose that after the perusal of it she could ever again have regarded him with any other feeling than that of a vindictive hate. In *her* letter there was not the slightest allusion to that one which he had penned. Indeed, the very opening lines of Juliana's epistle reproached him for not writing to her; and indicated an uncertainty on her part as to the resolve to which he might have come when leaving Lincolnshire. No: it was evident enough that Juliana had not received the letter which he had written at Mr. Denison's dictation. But wherefore had she not received it? Had Mr Denison himself, on second thoughts, suppressed it? or had it been sent and miscarried? Frank was bewildered: he knew not what to think;—and in this mood he walked on towards the mansion.

Near the principal entrance he encountered the Marquis of Eagledean; and feeling that his countenance would betray that something had occurred, even if he himself should hesitate to reveal it,—feeling likewise that he ought not to keep anything

secret from that kind and generous-hearted parent,—he at once told the Marquis all that had just taken place. Though he had destroyed the letter, he nevertheless remembered the precise tenour of its contents: and these he repeated,—omitting however, with a natural delicacy, all mention of those passages which alluded to his sister.

"My dear Frank," said the Marquis, in the kindest tone, "you have done wisely to avoid the snare which this syren has set to entrap you. I rejoice also in the candour with which you have just communicated the incident: depend upon it, my son, such frankness will find its reward."

"Since we are again speaking upon this subject, my dear father," observed the youth, "I am reminded that I have not as yet written to Mr. Hawkshaw according to my promise. Surely towards that gentleman there can be no need for you to preserve an *incognito*, as he himself would be the last in the world to frustrate any purposes you may have in view. Besides, Mr. Denison knows that you are in England; and wherefore not Mr. Hawkshaw, who behaved so kindly towards me?"

"My dear Frank," responded the Marquis, "have a little patience,—and in a few days there will no longer be any necessity for me to keep the *incognito* towards any one."

CHAPTER CIV.

THE MESSENGER'S RETURN.—THE WEDDING-DAY.

THE fortnight which was to elapse ere the double marriage of Lady Saxondale and Juliana took place, was drawing to a close—the day for the nuptials was near at hand—and all the arrangements were made for the solemnization of the ceremonies. It was settled that the weddings should take place by special license at Saxondale Castle, and at the hour of noon—so that immediately after the nuptials, Lady Saxondale and her husband would take their departure for London on the one hand, while on the other Mr. Hawkshaw would bear away his bride to the Hall. The ceremony was to be conducted with as much privacy as could be observed in such matters,—only those whose assistance was absolutely necessary, being invited. Such were the arrangements; and, as above stated, the day was now close at hand.

It was evening: and Juliana was seated alone in the drawing-room—her mother being in the library, writing letters—and Lord Harold rambling by himself in the garden. Miss Farefield felt particularly restless and uneasy: she was anxiously expecting the return of her messenger; for on the response he brought back, depended the course she had to pursue. Earnestly did she hope that Francis Paton would send a reply favourable to her wishes: for she more than dreaded—she had the almost absolute certainty—that her amour with him, which had commenced two months back, would not be without its consequences. In short, she felt assured that she was in a way to become a mother. But if Frank were to refuse, should she still marry Mr. Hawkshaw? Yes: she saw no alternative. He was so fond—so confiding—he evidently put such implicit faith in her, that she might deceive him as to the paternity of the child which would thus be born seven months after their union. At all events, her position was desperate: she must marry some one; and if not Francis—why, then it must be Hawkshaw! Her mind was thus made up; and though her resolve was in one of its alternatives so treacherous and so criminal, she nevertheless swerved not from it. But at the same time she could not help feeling restless and uneasy as to the result of the letter she had sent to London,—a result upon which so much depended—a result, in short, which must decide whether she was to marry the one lover or the other.

In the midst of this unsettled mood of her's, on the particular evening of which we are writing, a domestic entered the apartment to announce that Mr. Woodman, the steward's brother, desired an audience of Miss Farefield. She at once ordered the man to be shown up; and during the few moments that elapsed ere her emissary made his appearance, the suspense she endured was of the most painful description. She felt the colour coming and going with the most rapid transitions upon her cheeks; and the palpitations of her heart were plainly audible. For, Oh! she ardently longed that Frank might be restored to her; and perhaps the sensuous fervour of that passion which she had all along felt for him, was now mingling with a somewhat more tender and even a purer feeling, since she had been led to suspect that she should become a mother—and he the father of the babe thus to be born!

When Woodman entered the drawing-room, Juliana could not immediately put to him the question to which she so ardently longed for an answer. Nor did she instantaneously perceive in his look or manner anything sufficiently significant to relieve her from suspense.

"You have seen him? you have been successful?" she at length said, perceiving that he did not at once speak of his own accord.

"After considerable trouble, Miss, I found Mr. Paton——"

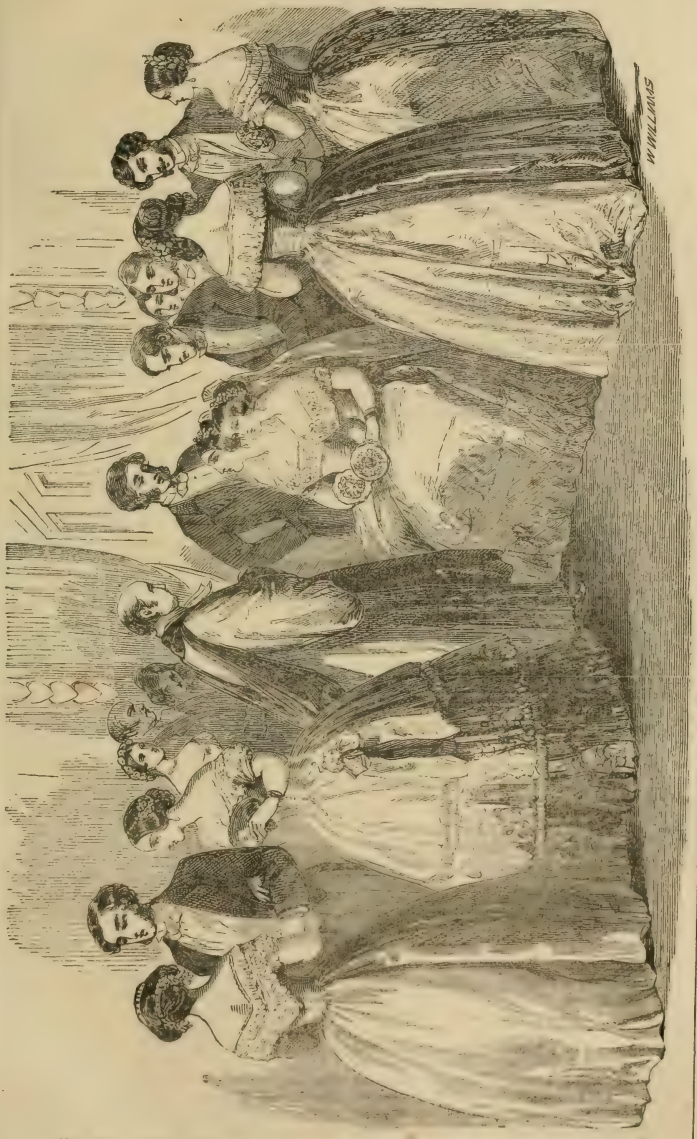
"And you gave him the letter? and he read it? and——and——he has not sent me a reply?"

"Only a verbal one," responded the emissary.

"Ah! a verbal one?" echoed Juliana, perceiving at once that all hope was dead in that quarter: and making a merit of necessity, she concealed her vexation—her grief too—beneath a look of suddenly assumed haughty scorn. "And what was this verbal answer?"

"Mr. Paton said, Miss," rejoined Woodman, "that he would abide by the result of the test, and that you would understand his meaning."

"Yes—I understand it——Oh, to be sure! I understand it!"—and then Juliana bit her lips with vexation; and it was only with a powerful effort she could keep back the tears of mingled spite and rage, disappointment and affliction——aye, and mortification likewise. "Thank you—thank you, Woodman, for the fidelity with which you have accomplished this mission. Here is the reward I promised you;"—and drawing forth her purse, she produced bank-notes and gold, from which she selected the sum of twenty pounds; but her hands trembled, and her fingers could scarcely hold the notes or count out the pieces.



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"I am very much obliged to you, Miss," said Woodman, as he gathered up the money.

"I need scarcely repeat," murmured Juliana, "what I have already said—that this is in the strictest confidence——"

"You know, Miss, that you can rely upon me—— And besides, you promised——"

"Yes: that I would provide for you well in some way or another. Fear nothing—I shall not forget my pledge—you shall have a good situation found you. But one word more! Where does this Mr. Paton live? and who are his parents?"

"He lives, Miss, at a very splendid seat near London——It is called Stamford Manor, being on a hill of that name——"

"But his parents—who are they?" demanded the young lady, somewhat impatiently.

"I could not exactly discover whether his parents lived there or not: I had so little time to make inquiries when once I had found Mr. Paton out—for your injunctions were so positive for me to lose no time in returning immediately after I had seen him——"

"Well, but who lives at the house, then?" demanded Juliana.

"A gentleman by the name of Gunthorpe," was the response.

"Gunthorpe?" echoed Juliana. "No wonder, then, that everything has failed," she murmured to herself: "for that man seems to be the evil genius of our family!"—then she added aloud, "No—Mr. Gunthorpe cannot be his father. Probably Mr. Paton is on a visit to him. That is sufficient, Woodman: you can retire."

The man accordingly bowed and took his departure from the room, leaving Juliana to ponder upon the information he had brought her. She did not however remain long thus ruminating; but proceeding to the library, advanced straight up to the table where Lady Saxondale was seated—and said, "Mother, have you heard anything lately relative to your friend Mr. Gunthorpe?"

"*My friend*, Juliana?" at once exclaimed Lady Saxondale, laying down her pen: "what means this ill-timed jest?"

"It is no jest, mother," responded the daughter. "I merely put a simple question, to which you might, had you chosen, have returned an equally plain answer."

"But why the question at all?"

"Simply because I have learnt that Francis Paton is very intimate with Mr. Gunthorpe—that, indeed, this youth is at present on a visit to that gentleman——"

"Gentleman!" said Lady Saxondale, contemptuously: "do you call a vulgar money-grubbing banker a gentleman?"

"No, certainly—I was wrong. That *person*, then," said Juliana.

"But what has it all got to do with us? Everything that regards Francis Paton," added Lady Saxondale, maliciously, "is of interest to you—and not to me."

"Perhaps. And yet methought you would like to know that Francis is thus intimate with Mr. Gunthorpe. Considering how Mr. Gunthorpe took it upon himself to interfere in your affairs—in respect, you know, mother, to a certain William Deveril," continued Juliana, now speaking maliciously in her turn, "it struck me as being somewhat ominous and suspicious that Mr. Gunthorpe should have as his guest this youth who was once in your service."

"I can see in it nothing but a coincidence," observed Lady Saxondale: and she took up her pen to resume her writing.

"You have not forgotten, mother," said Juliana, after a pause, "that this Mr. Gunthorpe came to England recommended as the very intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean; and as the Marquis is Lord Harold Staunton's uncle, I did not know whether it were at all possible for Mr. Gunthorpe to take any step in respect to your contemplated marriage."

"What step can he take?" inquired Lady Saxondale coldly. "For my part, I am no love-sick girl; and if the marriage were prevented, it would not break my heart. But it cannot be: Lord Harold Staunton is of age and his own master. Besides, the Marquis of Eagledean, who is no doubt still in Italy, cannot have given Mr. Gunthorpe *carte blanche* to interfere as he chooses with Lord Harold Staunton's affairs—even if he should have heard of our intended marriage at all."

"Most likely he has," observed Juliana: "for Francis Paton, who is now staying with him, having been in Lincolnshire a fortnight back——"

"When nothing was known of this intended marriage of mine," interjected her ladyship.

"Not positively known—but more than half suspected," continued Juliana. "To tell you the truth, for my part I like as little as may be the idea of this meddling Mr. Gunthorpe knowing anything at all about the affairs of our family. I will tell you something which has struck me as being singular. You remember that Mr. Gunthorpe and Deveril——"

"Well, well, Juliana," said her ladyship, somewhat impatiently,

"You remember, I say," continued the daughter, "that they were down here in Lincolnshire about five or six weeks back——just at the very time when the murder of those women took place——"

"Well, well, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, still more impatiently than before: and indeed she appeared *very* impatient at the prolongation of the discourse, or else at the turn it was taking.

"And very soon afterwards," added Miss Farefield, "Lady Macdonald and Florina left us so abruptly—indeed with an abruptness, and with a singularity of manner too, that savoured of actual rudeness. Do you not think that Mr. Gunthorpe's visit with Deveril to Lincolnshire on that occasion, was somehow or another connected with the precipitate departure of Florina and her aunt a few days afterwards?"

"Yes," observed Lady Saxondale: "it is not the first time that the idea has struck me."

"And then, too," continued Juliana, "you remember that when Edmund wrote to me, saying that his match was broken off, and he knew it was all through that meddling old scamp Gunthorpe—those were his very words——"

"Well, Juliana," interposed Lady Saxondale, "there can be no doubt that this Mr. Gunthorpe has been endeavouring to do me and mine all the mischief he could: but we must not exalt him into such importance as to believe that he is an ogre, or

an enchanter, or a magician, constantly lying in wait to devour us or work us an injury, and possessing the power to do either. But you seem superstitious, Juliana, upon the point ?"

"I candidly confess, mother," replied the young lady, "that I do not like the idea of Mr. Gunthorpe acquiring any farther insight into our affairs or our plans through the medium of young Paton."

"Did Francis Paton know that you were engaged to Mr. Hawkshaw?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"I think not," was Juliana's response: "but who can tell ?"

"If he did," observed the mother, "you are doubtless afraid that he has by this time informed Mr. Gunthorpe, and that Mr. Gunthorpe will act as a marplot?"

"I scarcely know what I think, or what I apprehend," answered Juliana. "All I know is that I could wish Frank had not formed an intimacy with that meddling old fellow."

With these words the young lady quitted the library; and hastening back to the drawing-room, she rang the bell. Of the footman who answered the summons, she inquired if Woodman was still within the castle-walls; and being informed that he was partaking of refreshments in the servants' hall, Juliana ordered him to be sent up. In a few minutes Woodman re-appeared in her presence.

"I forgot to ask you one or two questions," she said. "You did not mention to Mr. Paton anything relative to my engagement——I mean my rumoured marriage——I mean about Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"Nothing, Miss—I can assure you," responded the man. "You bade me be cautious——"

"Yes, yes. But Mr. Paton himself——"

"He said nothing on the subject."

"It is well," murmured Juliana, with a feeling of relief. "By the bye, you forgot to tell me how Mr. Paton received my letter—how he looked as he read it——in short, what impression it seemed to make upon him ?"

"At first he looked melancholy and serious," answered Woodman. "Indeed, I almost thought he would weep; and when he had finished reading it, he meditated so long and with such deepening melancholy——"

"Ah! then the response he sent back, was not instantaneously given?" said Juliana: "it was not abrupt—nor rude—nor impetuous——"

"No—nothing of the sort," rejoined Woodman. "And yet, Miss, to tell you the truth, it looked like a determination adopted with sorrow, but nevertheless irrevocably taken."

"Thank you, Woodman. That will do: you can retire:"—and when the man had once more quitted the room, Juliana said to herself, "After all, I do not think that Frank would say anything to do me an injury; and, as my mother has expressed it, his being with Mr. Gunthorpe is but a coincidence—a mere coincidence, which need not trouble me."

But still Juliana *did* feel uneasy. Vague misgivings continued to float in her mind; and presentiments of coming evil diffused their cold fears throughout her entire being. The more she pondered, too, on the colossal magnitude of that cheat she was about to impose upon Mr. Hawkshaw, the less confident did she feel of being enabled to carry it out successfully. And now, likewise, she began to reflect that during the last fortnight there had been something occasionally strange in the Squire's manner—that his endearments had been forced—that he had at times fixed upon her a peculiar look—that more than once he had seemed abstracted, not immediately answering the observations she was making at the moment—and that on other occasions, when they were walking in the garden or the grounds, he had turned towards her with such an abruptness that, had he been a stranger, she would have thought his intention was to deal her a sudden blow. None of these little circumstances had dwelt particularly in her memory at the time; and as they had been invariably succeeded by a renewal of endearments on Hawkshaw's part, they were soon forgotten altogether. But now that the wedding-day was so close at hand—that vague fears and misgivings were floating in her mind—and that she stood upon the threshold of perpetrating one of the most iniquitous and abominable cheats of which a woman could be guilty,—all those little circumstances which we have hastily glanced at, came back to her memory and added to her apprehensions. Her sleep that night was therefore troubled and uneasy: but when she awoke in the morning, and the sunbeams were shining in at her window, and the birds were carolling merrily in the garden-trees, and all seemed joyous and happy without, the young lady's spirits rose; and aided by her natural strength of mind, she succeeded in putting away the gloom from her soul as easily as she put back the cloud of raven hair from the bright beauty of her face. Again was she endowed with all her fortitude for a resolute perseverance in wrong-doing. She chided herself for having given way to those misgivings and presentiments of the previous evening: and she attributed to her fancy all those little peculiarities in Hawkshaw's manner which had swept like a cloud of ominous birds through the gloom of her mind.

"To-morrow is the wedding-day," she said to herself, as she looked forth from the window. "To-morrow I quit this sombre old castle to become the mistress of Hawkshaw Hall! To-day I look around—and there is not a blade of grass, a handful of earth, or a leaf upon a tree, which I can call my own: to-morrow I shall look around from another casement—and far as the eye can reach, all the broad acres I shall survey, all the fields from which the rich harvest has so lately been garnered in, and all the stately trees that embellish the wide expanse of landscape—all, all will be mine,—mine as the wife of Squire Hawkshaw of the Hall!"

Thus mused Juliana to herself; and throughout the remainder of that day no more unpleasant thoughts troubled her soul. Night came—"the last night," she said to herself, "that she was to pass beneath the roof of Saxondale Castle:" and if she did not close her eyes speedily in slumber, it was not because her mind was again agitated and restless—it was because she lay pondering upon the many things she should do in the new phase of existence upon which she was about to enter. When she did sleep, her dreams partook of the roseate tinge of the waking thoughts which had preceded them; and as the morning sunbeams poured their effulgence into her chamber, she awoke with happiness still in her heart. Even Frank was scarcely regretted on this morning—the morning of the wedding-day!

Having dressed herself, with the assistance of her maid, in an elegant *deshabillée*, Juliana descended to the breakfast-parlour, where Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold were already seated at table. Her ladyship looked pale; and though her demeanour was calm and composed as usual, yet the quick eye of Juliana could discern that her mother's countenance was not a faithful reflex of the condition of her mind. Had Lady Saxondale any misgiving floating there? or was she secretly chagrined at losing the independence of her widowed life by the contemplated marriage into which she was more or less forced? or was it, after all, the natural excitement only, which every woman must feel on the morning of a wedding-day? No doubt all of these had something to do with the inward fluttering which her ladyship in reality experienced—although perhaps the last-mentioned cause was the least potent or active of the three.

And what of Lord Harold Staunton? His demeanour had suddenly changed. Instead of being pale, absent, thoughtful, and abstracted, as he had for some time past appeared—he had a colour upon his cheeks, and there was a strange, almost a wild exuberance of spirits marking his speech and his looks. He laughed—he told witty anecdotes—he uttered lively jests—he rubbed his hands gleefully—and as he partook of the morning meal, he declared a dozen times that he never felt better in health or had a keener appetite in all his life. But here also the penetrating looks of Juliana discerned all that was unnatural and hollow in this mirth and in these boisterous spirits on the part of the young nobleman; and it was indeed to her a matter of mystery and wonder wherefore he should in reality be depressed, and why he should deem it necessary to assume a happiness which he felt not. Surely he need not marry Lady Saxondale unless he chose? At least so thought Juliana: and thus far she was right enough. But though she knew many things concerning her mother, she nevertheless entertained not the slightest suspicion of the existence of a certain terrible tie which bound as it were the destinies of that mother and of that young nobleman, the one to the other!

The breakfast was over: it was an early one—for was there not a second, even the marriage-feast itself, to be partaken of after the nuptial ceremonies? It was now only half-past nine o'clock; and at least two hours would elapse ere the arrival of the other bridegroom, the clergyman, and the few guests who had been invited. But then there were the wedding-garments to put on: and while Juliana retired on the one hand to her own chamber, Lady Saxondale on the other withdrew to her's—while Lord Harold went out to stroll for an hour ere he began the process of his own toilet. But at half-past eleven they were all three re-assembled in the drawing room; and all three were apparelled in a befitting manner for the nuptial ceremonies. Doubtless many of our lady-readers would like us to enter into a minute description of the wedding-dresses: but we confess our inability. Suffice it to say that they were of the richest, most tasteful, and most elegant kind; and that both mother and daughter looked grandly handsome. But was it not a hideous mockery for Juliana Farefield to appear in that virgin garb?—she whose purity had been already sacrificed on the altar of lustful passion!

Soon after Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold Staunton,—who, we should observe, was apparelled with exquisite taste, and still continued in that strange unnatural flow of spirits,—were assembled in the drawing-room at half-past eleven, Mr. Denison's carriage arrived at the Castle. This gentleman, accompanied by his wife, his eldest son, and his daughter-in-law, alighted from the vehicle. Scarcely had they been escorted up to the drawing-room, when Lord Blackwater and Sir John Knightley also arrived. A third carriage brought four young ladies who were to assist as bridemaids to Lady Saxondale and Juliana. These were four sisters, and were the cousins of the younger Mrs. Denison. Shortly after their arrival, the clergyman who was to officiate at the two-fold ceremony, made his appearance; and last of all—though not least of importance—came Mr. Hawkshaw. By a quarter to twelve the whole company were thus assembled in the drawing-room. The demeanour of Mr. Denison towards Juliana was precisely the same as if he were totally unacquainted with anything to her disparagement: but whatever constraint he had thus to put upon his feelings, the violence thereof was much mitigated by the circumstance that it was only necessary to address a few complimentary words to her on first entering the apartment, as Mr. Hawkshaw soon appeared and became immediately engrossed in the attentions which he had to pay to his intended bride.

Though all were thus assembled a quarter of an hour before noon, the ceremony was not instantaneously proceeded with, inasmuch as the clergyman thought it consistent with propriety and delicacy to wait for the precise moment that had been originally appointed. And even if such had not been his view and feeling in the matter, another reason would have produced the same result; and this was advanced by Mr. Hawkshaw.

Addressing himself to Lady Saxondale as the hostess of the castle, he said, "I have to apologise to your ladyship for a liberty which I have taken——"

"Mr. Hawkshaw," observed Lady Saxondale, with the blandest and most gracious smile, "is incapable of taking a liberty; and whatever he may have done, needs not this apologetic preface. I presume, my dear sir, that you have invited some friend to be present on the occasion?"

"Your ladyship has divined the exact truth," answered the Squire, bowing his acknowledgments for the urbanity of her speech. "I have indeed taken this liberty. My friend will be here at noon punctually; and it will afford me the utmost gratification to introduce him to your ladyship and the company assembled."

"It will afford us equal pleasure to receive him," rejoined Lady Saxondale.

Again Mr. Hawkshaw bowed, and then retreated to his chair by the side of Juliana's.

"And pray, my dear George," she said in a tender whisper, accompanied too with a still more tender look, "who is this friend that you expect?"

But before Mr. Hawkshaw could give any answer, the clergyman,—who was a very important personage in his own estimation—one of those fussy kind of gentlemen who like to see everything done in a regular business-like fashion, and who are as averse to delays as they are slow to push on the

march of events,—accosted the Squire; and clutching him by the arm, said, "My dear Hawkshaw, I hope your friend will not keep us waiting? You know how punctual I am: it now wants five minutes to twelve."

"You can go and put on your robes, my dear sir," responded the Squire: "for I will guarantee that as the clock strikes twelve, the friend whom I expect will be here."

"Good and well," said the clergyman: and with a very important air he issued forth from the room.

"In a few minutes, my dear Juliana," whispered the Squire, "our hands will be united. Tell me—do you feel as I do upon this happy and solemn occasion?"

"Do the epithets you have used typify your feelings, my dear George?" inquired the young lady, with another tender look. "Yes—I am indeed happy: how can I be otherwise? But you have not told me who——"

"And is your mother happy likewise?" asked Hawkshaw. "But no doubt of it! Who knows but that she is even happier than yourself?"

"Happier than I?" whispered Juliana, thinking the remark singular: but when she saw that the Squire's countenance expressed only its wonted frankness of good-humour, she smiled, observing, "What could be the meaning of that remark you have just made?"

"Simply this, my dear girl—that your mother has passed through the same ceremony before."

"Ah! I comprehend," observed Juliana, laughing. "But you have not as yet told me who it is you expect."

"And so you really experience a happiness without alloy?" quickly resumed the Squire, who appeared not to notice that renewal of a question which still remained unanswered. "Is it not the most important occasion of one's life?"

"Yes: and hence that certain degree of solemnity," replied Juliana, "which mingles with the happiness of one's thoughts."

"Chastening that happiness without subduing it," added Hawkshaw.

At this moment the clergyman re-entered the room, dressed in his canonicals; and glancing quickly around, he perceived no addition to the company whom he had left when he went forth a few minutes back. Advancing straight up to the Squire, he said, "Your friend is not come yet, Hawkshaw."

"Nor have you told me," said Juliana, "who he is."

But ere the Squire had time to utter a syllable of response to either of the remarks thus addressed to him, the clock over the entrance of the castle began to proclaim the hour of noon—the door of the apartment was thrown wide open—and the footman announced in a loud voice, "The Marquis of Eagledean!"

CHAPTER CV.

THE RESULT.

THE reader may conceive far more easily than we can possibly describe the effect produced upon Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold Staunton, when in the nobleman who was thus ushered into their presence, they recognised Mr. Gunthorpe. The mother and daughter felt a vague terror seize upon them, shooting through them indeed like an excruciating pang: but Lord Harold was struck with downright dismay. All the indignities which his uncle had sustained at his hand when he had fancied him to be plain Mr. Gunthorpe, rushed to his mind; and he was paralysed—rendered motionless as a statue!

Mr. Denison, starting up from his chair, rushed forward to seize the hand of the Marquis; and those two old friends exchanged warm but rapid greetings. Mr. Hawkshaw, without throwing a single look upon Juliana, likewise rose from his seat; and Mr. Denison at once introduced him to Lord Eagledean. There were then more claspings of hands: but from the circumstance of this introduction, it became clearly apparent to the lookers-on, that if the Marquis was really the friend whom Mr. Hawkshaw expected, they were at all events strangers to each other until now.

Mrs. Denison the elder, her son, and her daughter-in-law, had been admitted into the secret of all this; and they now exchanged significant looks. But the four bridemaids, Lord Blackwater, and Sir John Knightley, as well as the clergyman, were almost completely at a loss to understand why the appearance of the Marquis could be so very far from agreeable to Lady Saxondale, Juliana, and Lord Harold, as it evidently was. Of course they knew that Lord Harold was that nobleman's nephew: but they could scarcely conceive that such a marriage had been resolved upon without the consent of the Marquis. The only explanation they could possibly fall upon in the way of conjecture, was that the facts were the reverse—that the Marquis had *not* been previously informed of the engagement—that he did not approve of it—and that he came to prevent it. But then, why should Hawkshaw, her ladyship's intended son-in-law, have played such a seemingly perfidious part in reference to this expected guest whom he himself confessed to have invited?

Lord Harold Staunton, quickly recovering his presence of mind, and resolving to put a good face upon the matter, now hastened up to his uncle, when the greetings between that nobleman, Denison, and Hawkshaw, were over; and he made a movement as if to embrace his relative. But the Marquis, bending upon him a stern look, said, "Before I receive you to my arms, Harold, I must know whether it be as a dutiful and obedient nephew that I am to welcome you—or whether you will persevere in your own course, despite whatsoever counsel or commands I may give?"

Lord Harold was taken completely aback by this mode of address: his effrontery suddenly abandoned him—and he stood still, gazing in speechless bewilderment upon the Marquis; so that the scene was rapidly deepening in interest to all the lookers-on.

Meanwhile a sudden idea had flashed to the brain of Juliana—that brain which during the first moments after the appearance of Lord Eagledean, was racked with the most excruciating tortures. Gliding from her seat to the spot where Lady Saxondale had stood up from her own when the door was first

flung open, she whispered with nervous excitement in her mother's ear, "I understand it all! The Patons—brother and sister—are the children of this Marquis! It is self-evident! If he means mischief, it is for *you* to strike him dumb!"

Lady Saxondale gave her daughter a quick glance of intelligence; and now finding it necessary to take some decisive step, she assumed an air of dignified affability—advanced towards the Marquis—and said, "My lord, as the friend of Mr. Denison and of Mr. Hawkshaw, you are welcome at Saxondale Castle."

The Marquis of Eagledean bowed with cold dignity. Mr. Denison and Hawshaw had retreated somewhat when they beheld her ladyship approaching; and she, sweeping round her eyes to convince herself that the opportunity was favourable, suddenly bent forward and whispered in a hurried manner, "The reputation of your daughter Elizabeth is in my hands!"

No doubt the Marquis of Eagledean was fully prepared for some such threat as this, because he well knew—too well knew that Lady Saxondale was aware of Elizabeth Paton's antecedents;—and therefore he was not taken aback—he showed no sign of annoyance. Not a muscle of his countenance moved: indeed his demeanour continued so coldly reserved, so chillingly dignified, that Lady Saxondale fancied the arrow had not struck home, and that Juliana's surmise in respect to the Patons being the children of the Marquis was an erroneous one. Terror seized upon her: her guilty conscience suddenly raised up all her crimes to pass in rapid array before her mental vision. And what if the Marquis of Eagledean had become acquainted with any of these? what if he knew more than the *one* circumstance concerning which he had previously threatened her: namely, her affair with William Deveril? In short, Lady Saxondale, perceiving how calmly and unconcernedly the Marquis of Eagledean received the menace which she had thrown out in respect to Elizabeth Paton, was seized with the direst apprehension. On no occasion did her fortitude so completely abandon her all in an instant. Throwing a look of earnest appeal upon the Marquis, she said, "My lord, perhaps in consideration of the alliance about to take place between your lordship's nephew and my humble self, it would please you to have some private discourse with me——Perhaps your lordship has come for that purpose——In short, it would be better for us to retire to another room for a few minutes."

"No, Lady Saxondale—not immediately," replied the Marquis, with the air and in the voice of one who seemed to feel that he had both the power and the right to speak with authority. "Permit me, however, to sit next to your ladyship for a little while; and then, when the time comes, we may have some private conversation together."

With these words the Marquis of Eagledean offered Lady Saxondale his hand, and conducted her to an ottoman at the farther extremity of the spacious drawing-room; where, placing himself by her side, he hastily whispered in a manner audible to themselves alone, "You would do well, Lady Saxondale, to follow my bidding on the present occasion."

Her ladyship felt a cold tremor sweep through her entire form, as her guilty conscience again marshalled all her crimes in grim array before her mental vision; and she knew not with how many details of that dark and damning catalogue the Marquis might be acquainted. So she said not a word: but he read in her looks that the proud and haughty woman was completely subdued, and that she was pliant and ductile to his will. We should observe that the spot to which he had conducted her, and where they were thus seated together, was the farthest removed from the assembled company; so that whatever he might now say to her, stood no chance of being overheard by any others present.

Meanwhile Lord Harold Staunton, not knowing how to act or what to think, had retired apart from the rest; and seating himself in a window-recess, folded his arms—endeavoured to appear calm and unconcerned—but was evidently much troubled in his mind. For *he* too had a guilty conscience: *he* too was tortured with fears lest his uncle should have obtained a clue to the full measure of his turpitude; and if for a moment the idea again struck him of putting on a bold countenance and assuming an air of bravado, his heart failed him—he could not do it—he was cowed, dismayed, overawed. And now, therefore, all that cheerfulness of spirits which had seemed to inspire him in the morning—an unnatural cheerfulness, the forced effort of a peculiarly morbid state of mind—gave way and yielded to despondency, suspense, and alarm.

After Juliana had accosted her mother in the manner above described, and had whispered that rapid hint in her ear, she returned to her seat: but Mr. Hawkshaw did not resume his place by her side. She saw her mother approach the Marquis of Eagledean—she beheld her ladyship seize an opportunity to whisper something to that nobleman—she could guess what it was, she herself having furnished the hint—and she was thoroughly disconcerted on perceiving how lost it seemed to be upon the Marquis. Then she observed the sudden change which came over Lady Saxondale; and she saw that her mother was afraid. As the Marquis led her ladyship to the farther extremity of the room, Juliana followed them with her eyes: she could scarcely comprehend what all this meant; and presentiments of coming evil once more took possession of her soul. She glanced towards Hawkshaw: he was now conversing in hurried whispers with Mr. Denison; and there was something in both their countenances but little calculated to reassure Juliana or cheer her spirits. She had never seen Hawkshaw look as he now did: she had never seen such an expression of dark implacability and inexorable sternness upon that countenance whose aspect was habitually of such open-hearted and good-humoured frankness. In a word, she now apprehended everything terrible—exposure, disgrace, and ruin: she would have sprung from her seat and quitted the room, but she had not the power;—she was transfixed there—the consternation which was now upon her was of paralysing influence—her limbs felt as if turned into marble.

It has taken us a considerable time to give all these explanations; but in reality only a few minutes had as yet elapsed since the Marquis of Eagledean was so suddenly announced. The lookers-on were still for the most part lost in bewilderment: but it was evident enough that there was a storm-cloud which was about to burst. The clergyman, feeling himself somewhat awkward—being in full canonicals, and all signs of the in-

tended marriage-rites having as it were suddenly died away—was resolved to bring the present uncertain aspect of things to an issue, if possible; and approaching Mr. Hawkshaw, he said, "You perceive that I am in readiness to commence the ceremony."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Squire; and a very strange expression passed over his countenance. "You would wed me to Miss Farefield—is it not so?"

Those who understood nothing of the under-current of that new turn which the proceedings seemed to have taken since the entrance of the Marquis of Eagledean, were naturally astonished at what appeared to be so extraordinary an observation on the part of the Squire: but Juliana was smitten with a more terrible dismay, if possible, than that which had already seized upon her.

"Ladies and gentlemen," continued Mr. Hawkshaw, placing himself in the middle of the room, "I must crave your attention for a few minutes. When an honest man gives his heart to a young lady—and when he likewise proffers her his hand—purposing to bestow upon her the unsullied name which descended to him from his forefathers, as well as a share in all he possesses,—it is but right and just to suppose that he will be met in the same frank and generous confidence by the young lady herself. If she be aware of any impediment which in a moral, if not a legal point of view, should prevent her from responding in the affirmative to her suitor's proposal, should she not honourably decline it, even though she were to keep the reason closely locked up in her own heart? But what will you think, ladies and gentlemen, of a young lady, who, loving another—who, having given her heart to that other—and more, who having surrendered up her purity to that other—should nevertheless consent to become the wife of this honest and confiding man who loved her so faithfully but so blindly!"

Mr. Hawkshaw paused; and there was an indescribable sensation pervading the apartment. Juliana herself was almost annihilated. She sank back, covered with shame—filled with confusion—devoured with feelings which defy all description. She would have given worlds to be enabled to fly from the apartment; but she could not. Such was the state of her mind that she was as powerless and helpless as if physically a statue.

"This is too much—too much," said Lady Saxondale, who felt that the exposure of her daughter's shame would to a certain extent redound upon herself: and forgetting for an instant all her own sources of terror, she was about to spring up from the ottoman and rush forward to do something——anything——though she knew not what——to put an end to this most painful scene: but she felt herself held back.

"Your ladyship must remain here," said the Marquis in a low tone: but he spoke and he looked in a manner which rendered her again fearfully alive to the perils, whether real or imaginary, of her own position: so she sank back with confusion in her brain, terror in her soul, and torture in every nerve.

"Ladies and gentlemen," resumed Mr. Hawkshaw, in accents more implacable than those which he had hitherto used, "this is no common case, and and therefore I am taking no common course to expose it. It was sought to make me a dupe—to deceive me most grossly—to render this marriage a cloak for the most shameful profligacy—to turn the name of *husband* into a convenience to shield the part which it was hoped a paramour would play! Juliana Farefield," continued Hawkshaw, speaking in a voice of thunder, "I accuse *you* of all this! I will not mention that other name, unless you yourself choose to parade it: but I will tell you that I heard all that took place in the conservatory at my friend Denison's house. I saw upon what a precipice I stood—rage filled my heart—a feeling sprang up within me, which I had never known before: it was a craving for revenge! Ah, *then* I mastered my emotions, or at least the outward expression of them: for my resolve was promptly and suddenly taken. In a word, I determined to see how you would act—to continue with you as if I knew nothing—to see if remorse would smite you—and then to proceed accordingly. No: you have experienced not remorse—you would this day have given me your polluted hand: and hence this vengeance—hence this exposure! It is terrible, I know: but it is not more than you deserve. Had you been less guilty, it would seem an unmanly and a cowardly part which I am now performing. But you had no pity for me: you would have become my wife with the pre-conceived and deliberate intention of violating your marriage-vows: you are not a woman—you deserve not the consideration usually given to your sex: you are a fiend in female shape—and it is thus you are treated!"

There was a terrible energy in Hawkshaw's words; and the sensation they created, as the reader may suppose, was immense. But scarcely had he finished this speech—scarcely had the sounds of his crushingly denunciatory language died away—when a cry burst from Juliana's lips. She could endure it no longer—she was becoming mad: and springing from her seat, she bounded to the door. But Mr. Hawkshaw, still merciless and implacable, was by her side in a moment; and catching her by the wrist, he thundered forth, "Come forward, infamous creature! You have yet another ordeal to pass through! Your punishment is not complete! Remain, while I read a letter which was addressed to you by him whom you sought to retain as a paramour while taking me as a husband. This letter was written in the presence of Mr. Denison,—and it confirms all that I have said!"

"No, no!" shrieked forth Juliana: "I will not—I cannot. Kill me if you choose—but spare me a farther infliction!"

There was a wild agony in her accents—a piteous anguish in her looks—which moved the hearts of some present to compassion; and a murmur arose, which, without definite expression, nevertheless intelligibly conveyed an opinion that the Squire was sufficiently avenged.

"Well, then," he said, disdainfully tossing away from him the arm which he had grasped violently and had held firmly: "begone! Perhaps it were best for the sake of these ladies here, that you should relieve them of your polluted presence!"

But the door had closed behind Juliana even before the indignant and excited Hawkshaw had finished his sentence.

"My lord," said Lady Saxondale, in a low voice, but replete with ineffable anguish, "my daughter

will commit suicide—she will destroy herself—permit me to hasten to her—I conjure you!"

"Yes, speed after her," replied the Marquis of Eagledean, smitten with the truth of Lady Saxondale's apprehension; and in another moment she also had disappeared from the apartment.

But let it be understood that though she certainly thought it quite probable that Juliana would be driven to self-destruction by the tremendous exposure which had just taken place, it was not this that had distressed her: she had caught at the pretext in order to escape from a room where her own position had become perfectly intolerable.

"Ladies and gentlemen," resumed Mr. Hawkshaw, "it pains me to occupy your time in such a manner; but for my own justification must I read this letter,—suppressing only the signature that is appended to it. For I feel that the course I have taken is indeed so extraordinary and of such an extreme character, that if one single tittle of the accusations made by me against Juliana Farefield could be disproved—or, on the other hand, could not be supported by evidence—I should deserve to be branded as an unmanly coward—as a mean and paltry dastard. I beseech your attention, therefore, for a few minutes—only a few minutes."

He stopped short. A dead silence reigned—but curiosity was depicted on the countenance of almost everybody present; and therefore Mr. Hawkshaw proceeded to read aloud the letter which he drew forth from his pocket, and the contents of which were as follow:—

"JULIANA,—Everything is completely at an end between us. It is impossible that I can look upon your conduct otherwise than with horror and aversion. You have mistaken me: I am not so depraved as yourself. On the contrary, I thank God I possess feelings honourable enough and sentiments generous enough to save me from connivance in the detestable cheat which you proposed to practise towards a confiding gentleman. Deeply do I deplore the weakness of which I myself have been guilty, but into which you beguiled me. I understand you now, all too well! Never did I deem it possible that a young lady of high intelligence, excellent education, and with every faculty to appreciate the difference between right and wrong, could become so utterly depraved and so deeply profligate as you have shown yourself to be. I am shocked when I think that when you had once revealed your true nature, I could have been weak or insensate enough to throw myself in your way again. What! you dared insult me with the proposal that when you were married to another, I should become your pensioned paramour? you dared insult me with a proposition which by the mere fact of its being made, proved that you thought me as vile and infamous as yourself? No, Juliana—I am not. I have awakened from a dream. I tear your image from my heart—but only to trample it under foot—to tread it down deep in the mire as that of a polluted and loathsome creature!"

Thus ended the letter, save and except the signature, which Mr. Hawkshaw suppressed. Again did a profound silence prevail. The bridesmaids exchanged looks of mingled wonder and stupefaction: Lord Blackwater and Sir John Knightley gazed on each other as if to ask whether it were not all a dream: the clergyman stalked out of the room, in cold and offended dignity, to put off his canonicals. The Denisons rose with the evident intention of taking a prompt departure. Lord Harold Staunton, to whom all Juliana's wickedness was as new and as startling as to most others present, sat confounded,—forgetting everything except the monstrous revelations he had just heard. As for the Marquis of Eagledean, he likewise remained seated on the ottoman at a distance, and appeared to be wrapped up in profound and mournful reflection. Such too was the case: for he thought with deep sorrow of his daughter's past career, which had enabled Lady Saxondale to throw out that menace at him,—and he likewise pondered with regret upon the amour of his son with Juliana Farefield.

Suddenly arousing himself from this reverie, the Marquis of Eagledean rose from his seat—walked straight up to Lord Harold Staunton—and placing his hand upon his shoulder, said in a low but authoritative voice, "Nephew, follow me."

The young nobleman started, and for an instant looked vacantly up at his uncle; for it appeared to him a dream that the Mr. Gunthorpe, whom he had plundered and insulted, should be really and truly identical with the Marquis of Eagledean. But being thus recalled to the full consciousness of those circumstances by which he was surrounded, he rose from his seat, and followed his lordship from the room. When they were on the landing outside, the Marquis said, "You are better acquainted, Harold, with the interior of Saxondale Castle than I am; lead the way to some apartment where we may converse without fear of interruption."

"Will you come to my own chamber?" asked Lord Harold: and on the Marquis nodding an assent, he led the way thither.

CHAPTER CVI.

THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE uncle and nephew were now alone together. The former was cold and severe: the latter pale, and full of vague apprehension. The Marquis seated himself at the table in the middle of the room; and pointing to another chair, bade his nephew be seated likewise. Then there was a pause of a few moments, during which the old nobleman seemed to be preparing himself for the manner in which he should enter upon the business he had in hand.

"Nephew," he at length said, "the time is come when I may give you a few explanations relative to the course I have hitherto been adopting towards you. It came to my knowledge, while in Italy, that you were leading a life of which I could but little approve; and I also learnt that your sister Florina was engaged to be married to a young man whose only nobility consisted in his title, but whose character and conduct were very far from estimable. I will not, however, pretend that these were the only motives which made me resolve to visit England: but certain it is that they had their weight in leading me to this determination. In short, Harold, one of my purposes was to come and ascertain for myself the truth of those reports which had reached me in respect to your own conduct and the character of Florina's intended husband. Full well, alas! did I know that my personal appearance, during the lapse of years and a long absence from my native land, had become so changed that those who had formerly known me would not recognise me again. Assuming the character of an intimate friend of the Marquis of Eagledean, I gave to myself the repute

LADY SAXONDALE

of a rich banker, the better to avert all suspicion of my real identity, and at the same time to command a certain degree of respect. You remember, Harold, my first appearance before you in the box at the Opera. Accident had led me to the theatre at the same time that you were there with your sister and Lord Saxondale. While I was seated in the pit, you were pointed out to me; and I thought it an excellent opportunity to introduce myself. I had letters in my pocket-book, which I had already written in the name of the Marquis of Eagledean, as the proper passports to your acquaintance. And here I must observe that knowing that your aunt Lady Macdonald was not the best hand in the world at keeping a secret, I had resolved to preserve the *incognito* even unto her; and therefore the letter addressed to her ladyship, was in a similar strain to those intended for yourself and Florina. Well, I entered the Opera-box; and it required but a glance to convince me that Lord Saxondale was a frivolous, conceited, self-sufficient coxcomb. As for yourself, I saw that your exquisite aristocratic refinement was shocked at the idea of forming an intimacy with a queer-looking old fellow like myself. In respect to Florina, I was at once delighted with her; and I resolved that if the reports I had heard and the opinion I had already formed of her intended husband were justified by a farther acquaintance, the amiable and excellent girl should not be sacrificed to such a miserable coxcomb. A few days afterwards I dined with you. In every way was I determined to put you to the test. I purposely disputed with the driver of the cabriolet to see what impression the scene would make upon yourself and likewise upon Lord Saxondale: for with my experience of the world I have found that the true characters and dispositions of its denizens may be judged by the minutest trifles. I saw that you received me with a forced civility, while Lord Saxondale scarcely took any pains to hide his aversion and disgust. In the course of conversation I talked in a style to maintain my assumed character of a mere money-making man of business; and even in respect to my attorney I invented the most vulgar and ludicrous name as a substitute for his real one. But I need not dwell upon these details: doubtless you can recall them to memory? Suffice it to say that I soon perceived the real object for which I had been invited to dine with you. In plain terms, you wanted to make me useful—or in plainer terms still, to plunder me. I was resolved to see to what lengths you and your companion would go: for I knew full well that in the same way that you purposed to treat me, were you accustomed to treat others. I affected to be influenced by the wine which I drank: you endeavoured to ply me more and more; and still I continued to play my part. You obtained from me five thousand pounds. Perhaps you may now wonder that I thus easily parted with so large a sum, knowing that it would never be returned. But it was to me a mere trifle; and in suffering myself to be duped out of it, I acquired the certainty that my nephew and my niece's intended husband were but little better than a couple of scamps and blacklegs. You see that I speak plainly, Harold: for this is the day when truths have to be told."

The Marquis paused for a few moments. His nephew said nothing—but by his manner exhibited much humiliation, mingled with those same serious apprehensions which had all along been haunting him.

"I feared," continued the old nobleman, "that yourself and Lord Saxondale were thoroughly depraved: but still I was resolved to know more of you. I was likewise desirous to watch Florina's conduct, and ascertain whether it would confirm the favourable opinion which I had already formed of her. But on mature reflection, I determined not to visit Lady Macdonald immediately. I was fearful that she might possibly recognize me; and I did not choose to risk losing my *incognito* until the proper time should arrive for declaring myself. I accordingly wrote to her ladyship to the effect that certain occupations which I had in hand, compelled me to resign for the present the advantages I should have otherwise been rejoiced to reap from Lord Eagledean's letters of introduction. In order to carry out my views with regard to yourself—to watch you thoroughly—to probe your heart to its very centre—to comprehend your disposition fully—I determined to adopt some means of espying your actions. I was desirous to ascertain whether all good feelings and all good principles were utterly destroyed within you; or whether they merely lay dormant and were susceptible of resuscitation. In a word, I was anxious to discover whether you were inveterate in depravity—irredeemably plunged in profligacy; or whether under genial influences you might be reformed. I bethought me of your valet Alfred. I remembered how insolently supercilious was his manner when he witnessed the dispute which I purposely got up with the cab-driver, and how cringingly fawning did he subsequently become when on leaving your lodgings I placed gold in his hand. I know the world, Harold; and I saw therefore that your domestic was the individual suited to my purpose. I sought an opportunity of waylaying him; and without revealing who I really was, I explained enough of my views to make him comprehend what I required. I lavished gold upon him: and he became my creature. Such a fellow as that, Harold, would sell his very soul to Satan: he is one of that rapacious and bribeable class that for thirty pieces of silver would enact the part of Judas Iscariot all over again if an opportunity served. Well, he became my spy—yes, the spy that I set upon your actions. Then I obtained a still farther insight into your character: but upon these particulars it is not now my purpose to dwell. It was through him that I received intelligence of the contemplated duel between yourself and Mr. Deveril. I need not remind you how I appeared upon the ground in the hope of preventing it, or under what circumstances my design was frustrated. You doubtless know that I am the friend of William Deveril—one of the most excellent young men that ever resisted the temptations of this world and maintained an almost fabulous purity of conduct and immaculate virtue. I knew from the very first that the accusation levelled against him by Lady Saxondale was the foulest of calumnies: I soon obtained the evidence that it was so,—an evidence afforded by the rancorous spite and murderous projects of that bad woman towards him. You made a confidant of your valet Alfred in respect to all the circumstances of the masquerade and the origin of the duel; and Alfred duly informed me thereof. I obtained from him a written statement of all

those circumstances; and I threatened Lady Saxondale with law-proceedings on behalf Mr. Deveril. But while seeking—and indeed resolving, to clear up his reputation wheresoever it had been defamed, I did not wish to create a great scandal. Not that I had any pity for Lady Saxondale: but as your name was so closely mixed up in all those vile proceedings, it was for *your* sake that I endeavoured to bring her ladyship to terms which should produce a result answering every purpose in respect to Mr. Deveril, and without compromising you. Many circumstances have transpired to engage my time, to direct my attention elsewhere, and to divert my thoughts into other channels; and thus there has been a delay in bringing this matter to as prompt an issue as I originally intended. You came down into Lincolnshire to stay at the Castle: your aunt and your sister accompanied you. But I was resolved that Florina should not long remain in the contaminating society of Lady Saxondale. And here I must inform you that Mr. Deveril has for some time entertained the sincerest and most honourable affection for Florina: but this secret I knew not until after the duel. Then I determined to make him the means of opening Florina's eyes to the true character of Lady Saxondale; and I despatched him into Lincolnshire for the purpose. He came provided with that document which bore the signature of your valet Alfred——"

"And Florina and my aunt," said Lord Harold, in a deep voice, "are therefore acquainted with all the circumstances of that duel?"

"They are," replied the Marquis.

"Go on, my lord—go on, uncle!" said Harold, in nervous trepidation: for he was suffering the acutest suspense as to what *else* the Marquis might have learnt, and whether the worst that had come to his lordship's knowledge was yet told.

"After Deveril's return from Lincolnshire," continued the Marquis, "I wrote to Lady Macdonald, enjoining her to hasten back to London, alleging that I had most important communications to make to her on the part of the Marquis of Eagledean: for as yet she knew nothing of all that Deveril had told Florina. They did return to London; and then I lost no time in calling upon her ladyship. I saw her alone—I revealed myself to her—and it was at once decided between us that Lord Saxondale should receive his dismissal as Florina's suitor. Nay, more—I acquainted her with William Deveril's affection for that excellent girl; and it was likewise determined that their mutual love should not be thwarted. Subsequently Florina learnt who I really was—William Deveril likewise; and they therefore knew that I had the power and the means as well as the inclination to ensure their happiness."

Again did the Marquis of Eagledean pause for a few moments, to see whether his nephew would offer any comment upon all he had been saying: but Harold said nothing. He was still enduring the acutest suspense: he was anxious for his uncle to continue; and yet he was fearful of urging him to do so, lest he might betray his apprehensions.

"With regard to yourself, Harold," resumed Lord Eagledean, "I was somewhat at a loss how to act. From the circumstances of the masquerade and the duel, and from the fact that you remained with Lady Saxondale here at the Castle, I felt convinced that you were infatuated with this woman—that her charms and fascinations had woven a web about your heart—that you were ensnared in her meshes—and that you had surrendered yourself up completely to her Circean wiles. I knew therefore how difficult it would be to wean you away from such a woman——"

"Oh! wherefore did you not make the attempt?" suddenly ejaculated Lord Harold, as the thought struck him that if such had been done he might have been saved from *something* which lay like a weight of lead upon his soul, and was the source of those dire apprehensions which for an hour past had been racking and torturing him.

"Would you really have abandoned her?" asked his uncle, with the animation of hope and satisfaction upon his countenance.

"Yes—I would, I would!" rejoined Harold, with nervous vehemence: and he scarcely knew what he was saying. "But pray proceed—I conjure you to proceed!"

"Had I known, Harold," continued the Marquis, "that you were less infatuated with that woman than I imagined you to be, I should have at once sought to wean you from her. But I feared that you would have little respect for the wishes or remonstrances of an old uncle whom you might so easily set at defiance because you were certain of sooner or later succeeding to his title and estates, from neither of which he could debar you at his death. However, we will not dwell one moment longer than is necessary upon the present painful topics of discourse. Believing you to be thoroughly infatuated with Lady Saxondale, I anxiously sought for whatsoever evidence circumstances might throw in my way, to be enabled to tear the mask from her countenance, and reveal her true character in such a light as to make you recoil from it. But every time I was in hopes that such evidence would fall into my hands, I was disappointed."

The reader will comprehend that the Marquis here alluded to the assistance which he expected to receive from Chiffin,—first on the occasion when he and Deveril went down into Lincolnshire, and when the double murder on the bank of the river frustrated their views by compelling them at once to separate from the Cannibal; and on that other occasion when they were decoyed to Solomon Patch's boozing-ken, and were saved from death by the intervention of Madge Somers.

"Thus disappointed," continued Lord Eagledean, "I was uncertain how to act—when I received the intelligence that you were actually about to become the husband of Lady Saxondale. This I learnt by a letter from Mr. Denison, who is a very old friend of mine. At the same time I was informed that Miss Farefield had named the day of her mother's nuptials with yourself, as that on which she would bestow her own hand upon Mr. Hawkshaw. But Mr. Hawkshaw had discovered the infamy of Juliana's character, and was panting for vengeance. He and Mr. Denison were acting in concert; and thus I learnt all that was to take place. Then it occurred to me that I would be present at the exposure of the daughter, whose shame, to a certain extent redounding on the mother, would perhaps afford me a favourable opportunity to accomplish my aims and rescue you. At all events I was resolved to make one grand effort to save you before you linked your

destiny indissolubly with that of Lady Saxondale. You now comprehend wherefore I am here this day; and it is for you, Harold, to reply whether I have come in vain."

The Marquis of Eagledean ceased; and unspeakable was the relief experienced by Lord Harold Staunton when he found that the *one* tremendous topic which was uppermost in his own thoughts, and was the source of all his apprehensions, had not been touched upon by his uncle. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses: an enormous weight was lifted from his mind; and though the consciousness of guilt was still *there*, yet the fear of its exposure had suddenly passed away. Now therefore he had breathing time to turn his reflections into another channel. Assuredly, after the terrific scene which had ere now taken place in the drawing-room, he no longer wished to become the husband of Lady Saxondale. He knew that she would never again dare show her face in society after the exposure of her daughter's shame; and he also comprehended full well that the Marquis himself intended to wring from her ladyship a complete contradiction of the calumny uttered against Deveril. Thus, in all respects, would Lady Saxondale's reputation be ruined in the world; and Harold coveted not such a wife as that. Moreover, he judged from the altered tone and manner which his uncle had exhibited towards him during the latter portion of his explanations, that he would provide handsomely for him in a pecuniary sense, if he only displayed contrition for the past and gave solemn assurances for reform. Now, be it understood, that Harold had never loved Lady Saxondale: he had only been dazzled by her magnificent beauty—his passion had been excited by her gorgeous charms; and after he had once possessed her, he had rarely thought of her otherwise than as the means of giving him a good social position, with the enjoyment of ample wealth. It therefore required no sacrifice of feeling on his part to surrender her up altogether now. As for contrition, this was easily affected: as for assurances of reform, these were as readily to be given:—and for every possible consideration did he deem it expedient to adopt a deferential and conciliatory demeanour towards his uncle.

"Make no professions now, Harold," said the Marquis, cutting him short when he began to speak in the sense to which he had made up his mind. "I have already told you that I am well experienced in the world—and this experience teaches me that young men do not reform themselves all in an instant. It is sufficient for me on the present occasion to learn that you are willing to abandon the polluted society of Lady Saxondale, and leave yourself in my hands. I have a post-chaise waiting hard by: it is my purpose to depart hence so soon as I have obtained an interview with—*that woman*," he added contemptuously; "and you will go with me. Let your preparations be promptly made; and see that you keep me not waiting when I myself am ready."

The Marquis rose from his seat, and was about to quit the chamber—when he turned back and said, "I have yet many explanations to give you, Harold, in respect to myself, and concerning many events which have occurred during the last few weeks. But all these must be postponed until after we have quitted the Castle: and during our journey to London there will be ample time for discourse. I now go to seek Lady Saxondale:—hasten you whatsoever preparations you may have to make."

With these words Lord Eagledean left the chamber; and threading his way back, along the passages and down the stairs, in the direction of the sitting-apartments of the castellated mansion, he met a man-servant whom he desired to show him into some room where Lady Saxondale would afford him a few minutes' conversation. The footman at once conducted the Marquis into the library, and then sent up a message by Lucilla to the effect that his lordship requested to see Lady Saxondale.

The Marquis of Eagledean had not been many minutes alone in the library, when her ladyship made her appearance. She had put off the bridal-dress, having foreseen from the very first instant of the old nobleman's arrival that it had become a useless mockery: she was now apparelled in plainer and simpler raiment. Her countenance was pale—her features were rigid with a forced composure: but her eyes glittered with an uneasy and restless light. Slow and deliberate was her pace as she advanced into the room; and taking her seat in silence, she seemed to await the announcement of whatsoever business the Marquis of Eagledean might have in view.

CHAPTER CVII.

THE MARQUIS AND THE LADY.

THE Marquis of Eagledean felt that he had to deal with a woman of extraordinary strength of mind, and who perhaps during the interval of one hour since they had parted in the drawing-room, might have probably recovered some portion of the fortitude and effrontery she had then lost. At the same time he reflected that as he had gained a considerable vantage-ground at the outset of this day's proceedings, by the calm resoluteness of his own manner, it would not be difficult to reconquer it by the same means. From a variety of circumstances, with which the reader is acquainted, he had every reason to suspect that Lady Saxondale's conscience was very far from being a comfortable one. The worst, however, that he positively and definitely knew against her, was that murderous provocation of a duel which she had hoped would result in the fall of William Deveril. But he was aware that she had been in correspondence with Chiffin; and this could not be attributed to any good purpose. It was therefore natural to suspect that she had been guilty of other deeds beyond those which had come to his knowledge; and amongst these suspected crimes, might fairly be included the instigation of the Cannibal to prepare that pitfall at the boozing-ken. However, the Marquis was determined to do all he could to bend Lady Saxondale to the terms which he wished to impose—and, with this aim, to use not merely the facts which he had in his possession, but also the surmises and conjectures he had been led to form.

Gazing with a fixed sternness of purpose upon Lady Saxondale, he said, "Perhaps you are not at a loss to comprehend the nature of the demand which I have to make?"

"First of all," rejoined her ladyship, coldly and distantly, "you will perhaps inform me by what right you make any demand at all?"—for she was now as anxious as Lord Harold Staunton had on his part recently been, to ascertain the full extent of the Marquis of Eagledean's knowledge of past events.

"Your ladyship inquires," he said, "by what right I make a certain demand—and I reply, by the right which one wields who has another in his power."

"These are mere words, Lord Eagledean," she returned. "Will you look me in the face and tell me positively and truly that the Patons are not your children—and that it was not in consequence of all that has taken place between my daughter Juliana and Francis Paton, that you have come hither to-day?"

"I should have come hither, madam," responded Lord Eagledean, "if nothing of all that had taken place: I should have come on account of the contemplated marriage between yourself and Lord Harold Staunton."

"And I presume," observed Lady Saxondale, "that Lord Harold Staunton is infinitely rejoiced at the breaking-off of the match? Doubtless he has suddenly become a most dutiful nephew?"—and she spoke with much affected scorn and disdain; though her real object was to discover whether Lord Harold had been led to confess anything to his uncle which might compromise herself.

"If you please, Lady Saxondale, we will have no war of words—or at least," continued the Marquis, "as little of such a contention as possible. You ask me whether the Patons are my children—and I have not the slightest hesitation in telling you that they are."

"And having made this avowal," said her ladyship, "you will scarcely still insist upon any demand which you had previously resolved to make?—for you must know that with a single breath I can destroy the reputation of your daughter Elizabeth Paton."

"No, madam," rejoined the Marquis with so much seeming unconcern and cold indifference that Lady Saxondale herself was bewildered by it: "you will not dare open your lips to speak ill, whether truthfully or falsely, of a single soul in whom I am interested."

"Ah! my Lord Eagledean," she exclaimed, "this is bold language to use to me!"

"It may be so," he said: "but you are so completely in my power, that no language I may use can be too bold. Let us however cut short this controversy—for such is the air which our discourse has assumed. Lady Saxondale," continued the Marquis sternly and resolutely, "there are writing-materials close at hand: have the kindness to make use of them at once, for the purpose of drawing up a full and complete contradiction of the base calumny you propagated in respect to William Deveril."

"William Deveril!" echoed her ladyship bitterly: "always William Deveril with you! It is the old story."

"Yes: but it must now be brought to an end. Madam," added Lord Eagledean emphatically, "I am in haste to depart—I beg that you will trifle with me no longer:"—and he placed the writing-materials before her: for she had seated herself near the table on which they lay.

"And what, Lord Eagledean," she said, bending upon him a searching look, "if I positively refuse to listen to this insolent demand on your part?"

"Then, Lady Saxondale," he rejoined at once, "all I can say is that there will be an immediate explosion. In a word, I will give you into custody——"

"Custody?" she ejaculated, a ghastly expression of anguish suddenly sweeping over her countenance.

"Yes—custody," repeated the Marquis, perceiving that the arrow, aimed somewhat at random, had hit the right mark—and that the blow, experimentally dealt, had told with terrific effect.

"But, my lord," cried Lady Saxondale, not yet completely beaten, "I am at a loss to understand you."

"Do you require that I should become explicit?" he demanded, in a stern voice and with a penetrating look. "Cast your mental vision, Lady Saxondale, deep down into your heart—examine well your conscience—see if you have naught to be afraid of—reflect whether for every action of your life you could give so satisfactory an account that you would tremble not to look justice in the face. But do you wish me to be explicit, I ask? Think you, madam, that when I menaced you with law-proceedings on the behalf of Mr. Deveril, it was without good evidence to prove your iniquity? think you, madam, that I was ignorant of how the duel between my nephew and William Deveril was brought about? think you that I was ignorant of the circumstances of the masquerade? But perhaps you wish to know even still more. Madam, what answer would you give to justice if you were questioned in respect to your correspondence with an infamous character, the bare mention of whose name is fraught with horror——I mean a certain Chiffin ——Ah! I see, madam, that your conscience is not tranquil while I am thus speaking! But would you know still more? What answer are you prepared to give to the nearest magistrate if I accuse you ——yes, *you*, Lady Saxondale—of having instigated that same miscreant Chiffin to take my life and that of William Deveril? and if I affirm that in consequence of such instigation, the diabolical attempt was made but a short time back?"

Lady Saxondale looked strange indeed at this announcement, because it was the first that she had heard of that attempt. She did not however forget the hint she had thrown out to Chiffin, and the immensity of the reward she had offered; and thus, mingled with her surprise there was a guilty confusion, which notwithstanding all her effrontery, she could not possibly conceal.

"Do you wish to know more, Lady Saxondale?" continued the Marquis, perceiving full well the powerful impression his words had made: "and again I say look down into your heart——"

"No, no!" ejaculated the miserable woman, her brain whirling with terrific apprehensions: "I wish to hear no more! Lord Eagledean, you are implacable towards me—you are merciless and cruel to a degree! Wherefore do you persecute me thus? what harm have I done you?——what harm, I say, have I done you?"—and she now spoke with passionate vehemence.

"Lady Saxondale, the matter is not to be treated in this way," responded the Marquis. "Do not think it is pleasant for me to war against women: out if women forget themselves——Yet I will not, by means of reproaches, increase the bitterness of your feelings: for heaven knows they *must* be bitter enough! In a word, then, you have inflicted an injury — you must make reparation — and that speedily!"

"But if I sign this paper," said her ladyship, suddenly becoming calm, though it was with an unnatural tranquillity, "will you depart hence at once? will you leave me unmolested?"

"Give me such a document as I require," replied Lord Eagledean, "and I take myself hence without delay."

"Then be it so," rejoined Lady Saxondale: and snatching up a pen, she said, "Dictate what you will: I am prepared to write."

"Stop! I have a draught with me," said the Marquis, "of what is requisite to give the fullest contradiction to the calumny you propagated. Here it is:"—and he produced a paper drawn up in a legal hand—in fact, by his own attorney.

"Give it to me," said Lady Saxondale: "I will copy it. But no!"—and she drew her hand across her forehead: "I have a pain *here*. I can scarcely see the characters traced upon that paper. Read the contents, my lord—I will write to your dictation. Perhaps I can *feel* to write, if I cannot *see*."

The Marquis of Eagledean was naturally too generous-hearted not to feel some small amount of pity for this woman whose mind, as he full well perceived, was now full of strange confusion and wildering trouble. But he could not retreat—he could not spare her one single pang that it cost her to fulfil the terms that he had imposed. In a slow and measured voice, he read from the paper which he held in his hand; and she went on writing. But she scarcely knew what it was that she thus put down to his dictation: her hand moved mechanically—and it was in a kind of automaton-like manner that she guided the pen over the paper. All this while her countenance was very pale: her olive complexion gave it a tinge of ghastly sallowness;—but her eyes burnt like living coals, and felt as such in their sockets.

At length the task was completed; and flinging down the pen, Lady Saxondale merely ejaculated, "There!"

The Marquis of Eagledean took up the document which she had just finished—glanced rapidly over it —satisfied himself that it was correct — and perceived that the signature was duly affixed. He could not help observing that the writing was singularly regular, preserving all the gracefulness and beauty of a delicate female hand. Lady Saxondale gazed fixedly upon him—but yet in a strange vacant manner—as he thus examined the paper; and when he had consigned it to his pocket-book, she said, "Now, my lord, are you satisfied that I have stamped the ruin of my reputation?"

"Lady Saxondale," he replied, "you must bear in mind that you have drawn all this upon yourself. But if it be a solace to you—although you have little right indeed to expect any consolatory assurance at my hands, after having instigated a bravo to take my life——"

"But this solace—this solace that you speak of—what is it?" she demanded petulantly.

"I was about to say that it is not my purpose to blazon this document forth to the world. It will be placed in the hands of Lady Macdonald, who is acquainted with all the circle of your friends, and who can thus contradict the calumny wheresoever you spread it. This is absolutely necessary: but beyond that proceeding, no advantage will be taken of the confession you have made."

"Oh! it is most kind of you," said Lady Saxondale, with bitterest irony upon her pale quivering lip, "to proffer me such a solace as this! Pray, my lord, for whose opinion think you I care, save for that of the circle of my friends?—and *there* my reputation is to be ruined! Do not therefore make a merit of something for which I do not thank you. Perhaps you would wish me to go down upon my knees and cringingly express my gratitude that you do not placard a printed statement on every wall throughout the metropolis? But enough!" she abruptly cried, with an equally sudden recovery of an air of haughty fortitude, blended even with defiance. "You assured me that when once possessed of that document, you would take your departure."

"And I will keep my word," rejoined the Marquis: then with a bow he issued forth from the library.

Lady Saxondale was now alone. For some minutes she stood with her eyes fixed in a strange manner in the direction of the door by which Lord Eagledean had taken his departure: but she was in reality gazing upon vacancy. Her features, ghastly pale, were rigid with despair: she looked like a woman who had nothing worth living for in this world,—a woman from whose soul every earthly hope had fled, and whose only mood was a longing for self-destruction. Slowly she began to pace to and fro in that spacious library. Heaven alone can tell how great was the anguish of her thoughts, or what dark and terrible things kept trooping through her mind. However enormous her guilt — however manifold her crimes—however immense her turpitude,—there assuredly was a punishment for it all even in this world—a hell which she experienced even on this side of the grave, and the tortures of which were racking her then and there. For more than an hour did she remain by herself in the library. At the expiration of that time she rang the bell; and arming herself with as much composure as possible, awaited the entrance of the domestic in answer to that summons. In a few moments the door opened, and a footman entered.

"Has the Marquis of Eagledean taken his departure?" she asked, in a voice so cold that it appeared to the man to be strangely calm and firm.

"He has, my lady," was the response; "nearly an hour ago."

"And Lord Harold Staunton?"

"His lordship went away with the Marquis."

"How did they go?" inquired Lady Saxondale, after a brief pause.

"The Marquis of Eagledean had a post-chaise waiting the whole time that he was here," rejoined the domestic.

"And do you know," was her ladyship's next question, "in which direction they went?"

"To Lincoln, my lady," was the answer; "and

I heard the Marquis say to Mr. Denison that he and Lord Harold were going back to London with the least possible delay."

"It is well," murmured Lady Saxondale to herself. "But the Denisons?"

"They have all taken their departure, my lady. They waited until the Marquis of Eagledean had terminated his interview with your ladyship—and I heard Mr. Denison press his lordship to stay with him a few days——but——"

"The Denisons are gone, then? And the others ——Mr. Hawkshaw——and all those, I mean, who were assembled at the Castle ere now——"

"They are gone, my lady."

"That will do," responded the mistress of the mansion: and she turned away to one of the windows of the library.

The servant disappeared: Lady Saxondale was once more alone. But had any one been present to observe her now, he might have supposed that she was gazing forth upon the beautiful landscape of garden and park, grove and field, which stretched before her as far as the eye could reach; and yet she saw nothing of it at all—no, not a single feature of that fair prospect. She was once more gazing upon vacancy. For some minutes did she remain thus—and then abruptly turned away from the casement.

"At all events," she muttered to herself, "the Marquis is keeping his word: there is nothing to be apprehended. Had he purposed to deceive me—had he intended to invoke the vengeance of justice against me—he would not have taken his prompt departure for London thus. But does my resolve remain the same? Yes, yes: it does—it must. And now to see Juliana!"

Lady Saxondale went forth from the library—ascended the staircase—and proceeded to her daughter's chamber. Juliana had thrown aside—or rather torn off—the bridal-dress: it lay scattered in fragments upon the floor. She had hurried on another garment; and she was now half reclining upon a sofa in that bed-chamber, the image of blank despair. All tint of vital colouring had fled from her cheeks: her countenance was as ghastly pale as that of her mother;—or rather, with its olive complexion, it had that same shade of corpse-like sallowness. Her elbow rested upon the elevated extremity of the sofa—her hand supported her head—her hair had become disarranged in the fit of frenzied spite with which she had torn off the bridal trappings, and it flowed in dishevelled but luxuriant masses over her shoulders. She did not hear her mother enter the room; and even when Lady Saxondale stood before her, she did not seem to notice her presence. We may say of her as we have just now said of the mother herself, that she looked a being who had no farther concern with this world, save and except to escape from it as speedily as possible.

"Juliana," said Lady Saxondale, in a low cold voice, "what do you intend to do?"

"Did you speak, mother?" she asked, slowly looking up, but without otherwise altering her position on the sofa: and though her eyes were now fixed on Lady Saxondale's countenance, there was still the vacancy of blank despair in their gaze.

"Yes—I spoke, Juliana—and I asked you what you purposed to do?"

"What can I do, mother? what would you have me do? am I not lost—ruined—undone? My God, what have I suffered within the last two or three hours! And you came not near me, mother——"

"Yes: I came up to you almost immediately after you fled from the drawing-room," replied Lady Saxondale, "and when you were rending off your bridal-dress."

"Ah, the bridal-dress!" echoed Juliana bitterly: and for an instant her features were convulsed with the horrible nature of her thoughts. "True—I recollect—you came up: but you did not remain long."

"No: for I myself went to lay aside *my* bridal-dress. And then I was summoned into the presence of that tyrant Marquis who seemed to have grasped my destinies in his hand."

"And what wanted he with you, mother?" inquired Juliana, but without the excitement of curiosity: she spoke in the low deep accents of illimitable despair.

"To sign away my reputation, as your's had already been sacrificed in the drawing-room—to confess myself the slanderer of William Deveril—to avow that it was I who made overtures to him, and not he to me—that he repulsed *mine*—and that I calumniated him in all that I subsequently said!"

"Well, mother," said Juliana, "and now I will in my turn ask what *you* propose to do? But first of all tell me what has become of the guests assembled here some three hours back, and in whose presence I endured that fearful shame—that tremendous exposure—that crowning ignominy?"

"Where are those guests—our *friends*, I suppose you mean?" said Lady Saxondale bitterly. "They are all gone, every one of them—gone, no doubt to proclaim to their acquaintances all that occurred at the Castle—so that within twenty-four hours the whole county will ring with the intelligence, and within a few days the news will be propagated throughout the kingdom."

"It is horrible! it is horrible!" said Juliana, shuddering visibly. "And Lord Harold?"

"Gone too," quickly rejoined her mother. "Why should he stay?"

"Yes—why? He is gone, I presume, with his uncle, whom he will tell—if he has not told him already," said Juliana, "that he has been your paramour."

"Aye!" rejoined her ladyship; "and he may perhaps confess other things. Who knows? But it matters not. My resolve is taken."

"And my resolve also," replied Juliana, not heeding the other words Lady Saxondale had just uttered, and which indeed she comprehended not. "Yes—my resolve is taken!"

Then the mother and daughter looked each other steadily in the face: their eyes met—and a terrible free-masonry all of a sudden sprang into existence between the soul of the one and the soul of the other.

"I understand you, Juliana," said Lady Saxondale: "I know what your resolve is."

"And I understand you likewise, mother," was the daughter's response; "and I know what your resolve is."

"To die!"

"Yes—to die!"

On either side those brief monosyllables were

spoken firmly and resolutely, with a depth of desperation which the looks of the speakers likewise displayed; and then again did they gaze upon each other in a manner that would have been very terrible for an observer to contemplate, if any such observer had been present at the time. But there was none. Mother and daughter were alone together in that chamber.

"Yes," resumed Lady Saxondale after a pause, "that is my resolve——to die! Never more can I show my face to the world. I, who once stood upon so lofty a pedestal, shall soon become a degraded, a dishonoured, and a branded being! Besides, there are other reasons——But no matter. I repeat—my resolve is taken—to die!"

"And mine also," said Juliana. "I perhaps have less to live for than you. My disgrace is so signal—my dishonour so flagrant—my branding so terrible. And then, too, I have acquired the certainty that my amour with the now hated and detested Francis Paton——"

"I understand you, Juliana: you need say no more. We must both die. Will you that we die together?"

"Yes, yes—let us die together!" rejoined the daughter, clutching at the idea. "It may be a solace to have companionship even in death! I could almost love you once again, mother, for having made the offer."

"We will die together, Juliana:"—and then Lady Saxondale seated herself by her daughter's side upon the sofa—and they began to converse together in low ominous whispers, at the same time keeping their looks fixed upon each other with a strange, a sinister, and an awful meaning.

For five minutes did they thus discourse; and at the expiration of that interval Lady Saxondale rose up from the seat she had taken by her daughter's side.

"And you will have the courage, Juliana," she observed, "to maintain a calm and collected demeanour for the remainder of the day, in the presence of the domestics?"

"Mother, my looks shall be as calm and collected as your own," was the response, firmly and resolutely given. "If aught of our intention be betrayed, it shall not be my fault."

"Nor mine," rejoined Lady Saxondale: and she then quitted her daughter's chamber.

Descending once more to the library, she sat down at the table there and began to write. The statement she wrote was a lengthy one; and when she had finished it, she folded it up and placed it in an envelope, which she carefully sealed. Then she addressed the packet to the Lord High Chancellor of the United Kingdom, and locked it up in her writing-desk.

"At all events," she muttered to herself, "I will perform an act of vengeance before I go out of the world. Yes," she added, a fearfully malignant expression sweeping over her countenance, "that viper whom I have cherished and who has so often stung me, shall bitterly rue the insults he has made me endure! He will be trampled beneath society's heel——Ah, I shall be avenged upon him! I shall be avenged upon him!"

The dinner-bell now rang; and Lady Saxondale proceeded to the apartment where the meal was served up. Juliana speedily joined her mother there; and the domestics who waited at table, could not help exchanging furtive looks of surprise at the coolness with which the two ladies appeared to take the terrific scene of the morning. And those ladies—mother and daughter—allowed everything to go on in the usual way: they did not dismiss the servants from the room—they did not seem to be afraid or ashamed to look them in the face—they suffered all the ceremonies of the dinner-table to pass through the wonted routine. They ascended to the drawing-room, where they took coffee; and soon after ten o'clock, they separated to retire to their respective chambers.

CHAPTER CVIII.

SELF ASPHYXIATION.

It was about eleven o'clock when Lady Saxondale, enveloped in a *negligée* wrapper, and her feet thrust into slippers, issued forth from her bed-room and descended to the kitchen-premises of the Castle. She had previously assured herself, as well as she was able by attentive listening, that all the domestics had withdrawn to their rooms: but if she had happened to meet any one who had not yet retired, she had an excuse ready. She would have said that she was ill—she wanted something—the bell-pull in her chamber was broken—and so she was descending to procure for herself what she required. But she met no one: and with a wax-candle in her hand, she entered the spacious kitchen.

There she filled a large portable brazier with a quantity of charcoal, of which she had previously known an abundance was always kept for culinary purposes. This brazier she concealed beneath the ample folds of her wrapper; and retraced her way without encountering a soul. But instead of returning to her own chamber, Lady Saxondale struck off into the passages and corridors leading to the western side of the Castle—that portion of the immense edifice, which, as the reader will remember, was untenanted, and which contained the tapestry-rooms and the chapel. She extinguished the light on passing along the passage whence those tapestry-rooms opened on the one side, and whence an array of windows looked from the other upon the court-yard. This precaution was taken to prevent any of the domestics on the opposite side of the quadrangle from perceiving a light moving about in that passage. Well however did Lady Saxondale know her way, even if utter darkness had prevailed: but there was a glimmering of moonlight—and thus she had not the slightest difficulty in reaching that tapestry-room which was nearest to the chapel. There she lighted the wax-candle by means of matches which she had brought for the purpose: and depositing the brazier on the carpet, she listened at the door, which she held ajar. In a few moments she heard the light sounds of footsteps advancing along the corridor; and Juliana promptly made her appearance.

Miss Farefield was clad in a similar negligent manner as her mother: that is to say, she had on a wrapper and slippers. Her raven hair lay all unconfined in heavy masses upon her half-naked shoulders. She carried in her hand a small

chamber-lamp, the light of which she had also extinguished for the same precautionary reason that had influenced Lady Saxondale in a similar respect. She entered the room; and her ladyship closed and locked the door.

Although the wax-candle was burning, yet Juliana proceeded—quite in a mechanical way—to light the lamp which she had brought with her: for, as the reader may readily suppose, her thoughts were in a somewhat disordered state: there was an awful horror in her mind. And now the mother and daughter once more looked each other fixedly in the face. Both were of a death-like pallor: but in the countenance of each there was an expression of stern resolve. Their eyes burnt like fire. They were living jet in a state of internal candescence—with the light shining through, sinister and ominous—and shooting out rays bright and vivid. Wonderful was the resemblance between them both at this moment. Great was it on all occasions; for the mother looked much younger than she really was, and the daughter somewhat older: but the likeness between them now, was pre-eminently striking, had any observer been by to be smitten by it. We have often said, in the course of this narrative, that they were both grandly handsome, with a nobly aquiline cast of features: in form and symmetry, too, they were both alike splendid women,—and as they stood there, in the middle of that chamber, gazing upon each other—the light drapery developing rather than concealing the superb contours and rich proportions of each shape—they resembled the classic effigies of heathen goddesses,—but goddesses representing evil principles personified in beauteous forms!

It was not long that they stood thus contemplating each other,—looking down into the depths of each other's eyes, to obtain the mutual assurance that their resolve continued the same,—that dark resolve, so desperately taken,—and that there was no wavering, no vacillation, no timidity on either side. They did not need to ask each other the question in words: their looks were sufficient—and each saw that the other was staunch and firm.

"Now, Juliana, to work!" said Lady Saxondale. "Draw you the curtains closely over the windows—and I will perform my part."

Miss Farefield moved slowly towards the casements: but her hands were firm as she did what her mother told her. On the other side, Lady Saxondale gathered up the rug, tore down a quantity of that tapestry which had so long been an object of interest and curiosity for all visitors to the Castle, and with these materials proceeded to stop up the mouth of the chimney. Then she thrust her handkerchief into the keyhole of the door; and another piece of tapestry was carefully stuffed underneath that door, by aid of the point of the snuffers which belonged to the chamber-candlestick she had brought with her.

"Now, Juliana," she said, in a voice that was deep and low, but firm and resolute, "our preparations are completed—and one thing alone remains to be done."

"I understand, mother," responded the daughter, in a voice precisely similar to that of Lady Saxondale. "Proceed."

Then the mother, placing the brasier in the middle of the room, stooped down and lighted the charcoal. Juliana stood by and watched the operation. The charcoal quickly began to crackle and send forth sparks; for Lady Saxondale fanned it with her breath. Juliana now moved slowly away from that instrument of death, and laid herself upon a sofa. Precisely opposite there was another sofa; and on this did the mother sit down. Five minutes had by this time elapsed from the moment when the charcoal was first lighted; and both the ladies began to experience a slight head-ache.

"Do you think, mother," asked Juliana, "that these means of destruction are sure?"

"So sure," responded her ladyship, "that if *your* heart fail not, neither of us will ever go forth alive from this room."

"My heart will not fail," said Juliana.

"Had I not been convinced of the efficacy of *that*," resumed the mother, pointing towards the brazier, which was crackling and sparkling in the middle of the room, "I should have suggested other means. I possess poison, Juliana—poison the most rapid and subtle: but I did not propose that we should use it, because we had agreed to die together——"

"And you thought," observed Juliana, "that if we had decided upon poison, and you had swallowed your's a few moments before I raised mine to my lips, my heart would fail me and I should live on?"

"Your conjecture is partially right," rejoined her ladyship; "but not altogether so. I could not endure the idea of striking myself down with a sudden blow—of going out of this world all in an instant, as if smitten with a thunderbolt or blasted with a flash of lightning. Besides, there is something grand and magnanimous in testing one's courage thus."

"Yes," said Juliana, taking up the same strain of ideas, the better to nerve herself and support the fortitude which already armed her: "there is indeed something lofty and courageous in thus beholding Death advance at a slow and solemn pace. My fancy is now putting me to the test. I fix my gaze on the remotest corner of the room. Methinks I behold a grim shape gradually developing itself: it is the shape of a skeleton, with a crown upon his fleshless head, and a dart in its long, slender arm. It is the King of Terrors, as poets have described and artists have depicted him. Think you, mother, that you behold that shape?"

"Your words have conjured it up to my imagination," replied Lady Saxondale, "as vividly as it seems to be advancing towards yourself. But what do you feel now?"

"My head-ache is increasing," responded Juliana.

"And mine also," said the mother. "More than that—I have a constriction of the throat and a painful sensation in the eyes."

"Yes—a pricking sensation, as if millions of invisible needles were gently touching the orbs with their points."

There was a brief pause in the conversation now; and Lady Saxondale, who had hitherto been sitting on the sofa, changed her position into a reclining one. Meanwhile the combustion of the charcoal was proceeding rapidly; and the room was filling with smoke. The lamp burnt on one table—the candle on another; and both the lights were losing their brightness—the latter burning more dimly

than the former, which was protected by a globe of ground glass.

"How do you feel now?" asked Lady Saxondale, at the expiration of a few minutes; and it was altogether a quarter of an hour since the charcoal had first been lighted.

"My head-ache is increasing," replied Juliana: "the room is filling with smoke—it gets into my throat, which is as dry as if I had been swallowing ashes."

"Those are exactly my sensations," observed Lady Saxondale. "And now, too, that pricking feeling is felt in the nostrils."

"And in mine," said Juliana. "My eyes too water very much. If I close them, they feel as if myriads of particles of dust were under the lids——Ah, I am beginning to suffer much now."

"And I too. A shivering is passing through my frame. Juliana, shall we take one last embrace?"

"Yes, mother, if you will. Besides, it would look so much better to be discovered lying dead in each other's arms."

"I will come to you:" and Lady Saxondale endeavoured to raise herself up from the sofa; but she sank back, overpowered with a stifling sensation. "Nevertheless, I will!" she muttered to herself: and with another effort she gained her feet.

She walked in a staggering manner across the room, looking as if she were inebriated—ready to sink down every moment—but battling with a wondrous energy against the oppressive sensation which was upon her. She however succeeded in reaching the sofa where Juliana lay—and then literally tumbled down upon her. The sofa was a wide one: they lay down together, winding their arms about each other's neck. They kissed each other—and with far more tenderness than for a long, long time past they had mutually displayed. There was a profound silence for about three minutes; and the perspiration was pouring off their countenances, though they were both shivering with a sensation of cold throughout their entire forms.

"Oh, how I suffer!" at length murmured Juliana. "My head-ache is terrific. I feel as if I should like to sit up."

"And I also," said Lady Saxondale.

They accordingly both raised themselves to a sitting posture on the sofa, being still side by side: and then they felt a little better.

"Would it not be a curious document to publish," said Juliana, "if we had agreed at the outset to write down in detail all the sensations attendant on this self-asphyxiation?"

"Yes—very curious," responded the mother. "But what an idea, Juliana!"

"The candle has gone out—the lamp gives but a feeble glimmering light. I know not how it is," added Juliana, "but I should not like to die in the darkness. I hope the lamp will last. Oh, how heavy feels my head now! I must lie down again."

"But I shall endeavour to walk," said the mother: this time however she was utterly unable to gain her feet; and slipping from the sofa while making the attempt, she fell upon the floor.

"My ears tingle—I feel a dreadful sickness—my head-ache is violent beyond enduring. And, Oh! this shivering—this shivering!" added Juliana, her teeth chattering audibly; while yet the perspiration was pouring down her cheeks.

"And I too suffer horribly," said Lady Saxondale, in a low voice and speaking with difficulty. "Does the lamp still burn?"

"Yes: it burns—but so dimly—so dimly!"

"I cannot see it—and yet my eyes are wide open. All is blackness. Juliana, have you—have you—the—the courage to proceed?"

"Oh, mother!" murmured Miss Farefield; "why did you say that? You have suddenly given me a love of life——Oh, to live!——My God, to live!"

"What!" spoke Lady Saxondale, but very feebly and painfully: "to dare the scorn of the world?"

"Yes—to dare anything, if it be only to live! I suffer horribly——Water, water!——would to heaven that I had water! My strength is failing fast."

"And mine too—and mine too," murmured the mother: and then in scarcely audible accents, she said, "Water, water!"

"Oh, I cannot endure it—I must live—I must live!" resumed the wretched Juliana. "I will drag myself to the door and open it——No: the window is nearer——I will drag myself thither—I will dash my hand through the glass——"

Lady Saxondale only groaned; and Juliana knew not whether it was in assent of her proposition, or otherwise. She raised herself up from the sofa—she could scarcely stand—she steadied herself by holding on to the head of that sofa: then, like a child in its earliest experimental endeavours to walk, she quitted her hold on the sofa and staggered forward a few paces.

"Blindness seizes upon me," she murmured: "or else the lamp has gone out. O God, this—*this* is death!"—and she fell down heavily.

At that instant one of the windows of the chamber was gently raised; and a subdued ejaculation of mingled astonishment and alarm was uttered in a gruff voice. Some one was entering by that window: the fumes of the charcoal, gushing out through the vent thus afforded, had almost stifled the individual; and if he had not been endowed with great presence of mind, he would have fallen. But he kept his hold—yet paused for a few instants to ascertain the reason of that which had evoked the exclamation from his lips. The curtains blew aside—the lamp, which was not extinguished, flamed up once more as the fresh air entered—and the person at the casement was now enabled to plunge his looks into the apartment. To his increased amazement he beheld two females slowly raising themselves up from the floor and looking vacantly around. One of these he immediately recognized to be Lady Saxondale; and hesitating no longer, he stepped into the room. Her ladyship, reviving more rapidly than her daughter, soon came back to complete consciousness; and the first object which struck her, was the well-known form of Chiffin the Cannibal!

"Well, I'm blowed if ever I saw such a rum rig as this," muttered that individual in his usual growling tone: and his eyes settling upon the brazier which an intervening table had concealed from his view when he was at the window, he comprehended it all in an instant.

Snatching up that brazier, in which the charcoal was now burning more brightly than before on ac-

count of the influx of fresh air, he took it to the casement and flung it out. It dropped with a loud splash and a terrific hissing sound into the Trent; and the next moment all was still once more.

Lady Saxondale, now completely recovered so far as her senses were concerned—but feeling very ill and weak—hastened to assist Juliana to rise: and when the daughter's looks settled upon the dreadful countenance of the Cannibal, she was seized with a stupifying horror. The thought that flashed to her mind was that she had passed into the other world, and that Satan had her in his power. She therefore sank down again, with a heavy moan, upon the floor.

"Conceal yourself—hasten behind the curtains," said Lady Saxondale, in a quick whispering voice to Chiffin. "I will come to you presently."

The Cannibal hastened to obey her ladyship's instructions; and when he was hidden behind the draperies of the window that remained closed, she bent over her daughter, saying, "Rise, Juliana—shake off this lethargy—rise, I conjure you!"

Miss Farefield opened her eyes once more and threw her fearful looks around;—but encountering not the dread object which had filled her with so much horror, she began to fancy it was a dream, and took courage.

"We are not to die this time," whispered Lady Saxondale: "you sought to be saved, Juliana—and you are saved!"

"Water, mother—water!" murmured the young lady. "I am parched with thirst."

"There is none here—you much make an effort to reach your chamber—I will go with you. There! lean upon me—cling to me, if you will: but do, for heaven's sake, exert all your energies! Come, Juliana—come!"

Miss Farefield stood up; and hanging to her mother's arm, moved slowly towards the door. There her ladyship speedily tore away the tapestry that had been thrust underneath; and when the door was opened, the draught created between the passage and the window by which Chiffin had entered, tended considerably to revive Juliana. The mother and daughter threaded their way through the semi-obscurity of the passages and corridors, towards that part of the building in which their own chambers were situated; and on reaching Juliana's apartment, they both drank large draughts of water with avidity. Lady Saxondale lighted a candle, hastened to the dining-room, and procured some wine. Returning to her daughter's chamber, they both partook of that wine; and they felt still more refreshed—still more invigorated.

"It appears to me all a dream," said Juliana, who had thrown herself upon the sofa. "But tell me—whom did I see? how was it that we were saved? who was that intruder?"

"Some robber that broke in," replied Lady Saxondale. "Did you not observe how precipitately he fled? But, no—you could not observe it——"

"I observed, mother, that he stood in the middle of the room," interrupted Juliana, "not exactly as a robber—but as one who seemed to be conscious of full impunity there."

"Never mind who he was, Juliana. Get you to bed. You will no doubt be very ill to-morrow: you will perhaps have to keep your chamber for a day or two——"

"But the state of that room—the torn tapestries—the odour of the charcoal! Suspicions will be excited——"

"Leave it all to me," quickly rejoined the mother. "But answer me, Juliana! Do you intend to live? Remember—I have a subtle poison——"

"Oh, no—no! mention it not!" and the young lady's countenance was convulsed with agonized horror as she spoke. "I have looked Death too closely in the face not to love the life which is restored to me, although it is a life of disgrace and dishonour. But you, mother—do you still think of self-destruction?"

"No, Juliana—no!" replied Lady Saxondale, with a visible shudder. "I could not—I could not!"

Miss Farefield entered her couch; and Lady Saxondale stole forth from the chamber. She was so weak and enfeebled she could scarcely drag herself along; and she would have given worlds, had she possessed them, to be enabled to go and seek her own bed. But she was compelled to return to that room which had so nearly proved the scene of death for herself and her daughter: she was compelled to return thither, not merely to remove the evidences of the deed that had been attempted, but likewise to see wherefore Chiffin the Cannibal had sought her this night. Ere proceeding thither, she entered her own room—took a quantity of money in notes and gold—and then retraced her way to the western side of the building.

On entering the apartment where she had left the Cannibal, she felt so weak that she was forced to fling herself upon the sofa. She found Chiffin seated upon a chair, with his club in his hand, and a grim expression of wonder still upon his countenance.

"Well, my lady," he said, "it seems to me that I interrupted as pretty a sport as ever was going on in an autumn night. What the deuce did it all mean?"

"Do not ask me for explanations," replied her ladyship quickly: "you can doubtless full well conjecture—and all things considered, I rather thank you for coming so opportunely——But no matter! Tell me—wherefore have you come?"

"I thought it just likely," answered Chiffin, "that you might wish to have a chat with me upon different matters. You know you told me you would look into the chapel on certain nights at eleven o'clock. This is one of the nights; and though I am an hour behind my time through getting down into these parts later than I thought I should, yet I resolved to look in. If so be I hadn't met your ladyship, I should have settled myself for a comfortable nap on one of them sofas, and should have got away afore day-break with the intention of coming back again on the next appointed night. But do tell me—what has happened to make your ladyship and that 'ansom daughter of your'n try to kill yourselves? I don't ask out of idle curiosity, but because I know something of your affairs——"

"Again I say do not question me!" interrupted her ladyship petulantly. "But yes," she added, as a recollection struck her, "I had better tell you. You have made some attempt to get rid of those two persons——"

"To be sure—and that's one thing I wanted to

chat about," remarked Chiffin; "'cause why, you must take the will for the deed, and shell out at least a part of the reward promised at the time—perticklar as I nearly got killed myself in trying to send those two chaps comfortably and quietly out of the world."

"Yes, yes—you shall have money—I knew you required it—I have brought it with me. Here it is."

"Thank 'ee kindly, ma'am," said the Cannibal, rising from his chair to receive the amount, which, without inspecting it, he judged to be pretty considerable. "And now about this here business I was going to tell you of——But, ah! what the deuce is that?"

"Away, away with you!" cried Lady Saxondale, seized with a wild affright: for the cause of the Cannibal's sudden ejaculation was a violent pealing of the bell at the Castle-entrance, and the sounds of which rang throughout the entire building.

The Cannibal stuffed the bank-notes and gold into one of his pockets and was flying to the open window, when, suddenly recollecting something, he stopped short for a moment, and said, "When and where shall I see you again, ma'am?"

"Go back to London—do not remain in this neighbourhood—for heaven's sake don't!" ejaculated her ladyship. "I shall myself be in London in a few days—I will write to you——Away! away!"

She was in a condition of wild excitement; and Chiffin the Cannibal, fearing that his situation was indeed precarious, made a speedy exit by means of the window, which Lady Saxondale hastened to close after him. Then she tore down the bundle of tapestry from the chimney—dragged it into the middle of the room—and left it there. Snatching up the lamp—(the candlestick she had taken with her when leading Juliana away)—she sped back in the direction of her own chamber. Fortunately she succeeded in gaining it without being observed, though several of the domestics were now moving about: for that loud and continuous pealing at the bell had alarmed the entire household. Lady Saxondale now rang her own bell; and Lucilla, half-dressed and with frightened looks, almost immediately made her appearance.

"What is the matter?" demanded her ladyship, in a quick and excited voice. "Go and see—hasten—and return speedily."

Lucilla departed to obey the orders of her mistress, who, fearful lest Juliana might in a moment of apprehension betray something of the night's proceedings, lost no time in repairing to her chamber. Miss Farefield was indeed seriously alarmed, and was almost in an hysterical state,—which, strong-minded though she were, was scarcely to be wondered at, after the dreadful excitement she had gone through in the day, and the effects of the suicidal attempt so recently made.

"For heaven's sake, exhibit no weakness now!" said Lady Saxondale. "Remain quiet—I will tell the maids that I have been to reassure you—do not ring for them—do not quit your bed—but endeavour to obtain some rest. I understand the cause of this pealing at the gate. That man threw the burning brazier out of the window: doubtless it was seen by persons in the neighbourhood——"

"But the state of the room?" interrupted Juliana; "the torn tapestry—the odour of the charcoal——"

"That odour is not perceptible now," quickly responded Lady Saxondale: "the fresh breeze through the window has taken it away. Never mind the torn tapestry—let the servants and those persons who have come to give the alarm, form what surmise they will. And now compose yourself, Juliana—compose yourself: we have so much need of all our fortitude!"

With these words Lady Saxondale quitted the chamber, and returned to her own apartment There she was almost immediately joined by Lucilla, who informed her that a couple of labourers, passing through the fields on the other side of the river, had seen what appeared to be a ball of fire shoot forth from one of the windows of the tapestry-rooms; and that crossing the bridge, which was at a little distance from the castle, they had come round to the front with all possible speed to give the alarm. Lucilla farther observed that the butler and several other servants had gone to examine the apartments on the western side of the castle; and that they were all much alarmed at the intelligence they had received.

Lady Saxondale, affecting to be much astonished at Lucilla's information, threw an ample shawl over her shoulders; and bidding the girl follow with the lamp, hastened towards the tapestry-rooms. She found the domestics and the two labourers in that apartment where the double attempt at suicide had been so ineffectually made; and the moment she crossed the threshold, her ladyship pretended to be as much enraged as surprised at the spectacle of the torn tapestry. She demanded what it meant: but, as a matter of course, no one could give her any explanation. That some person had been there, was evident enough: and it was indeed a puzzle for all, except Lady Saxondale herself, to form even the slightest conjecture as to what motive anybody could possibly have had in destroying the tapestry. The question likewise arose—what meant the ball of fire which the labourers had seen? Who could explain this? The only person then present who had the power to do so, did not choose—but, on the contrary, affected to be as much astonished as the rest.

There was a growing consternation upon the countenances of the domestics and the labourers: for, as the reader will recollect, it was not the first time that strange stories had been circulated in respect to the western side of Saxondale Castle: and how was it now possible to account for that vivid light which had shot forth from the window, and had seemed to disappear in the river—or for that torn tapestry and the disordered state of the room—except by attributing these things to the freaks of evil spirits? Lady Saxondale, who on all previous occasions had wrathfully censured and strenuously discouraged the superstitious tales that were current in respect to the Castle, now appeared to be dismayed and confounded, and to share the terror of the rest. Retiring from the room, she was promptly followed by the others, who had no inclination to remain behind in a place which they now more firmly than ever believed to be haunted. Ordering the door to be locked, Lady Saxondale returned to the other part of the building; and having liberally rewarded the labourers for their

trouble, and recommended the servants to retire to their respective chambers, she once more sought her own.

In the afternoon of the following day Lady Saxondale and Juliana took their departure from the Castle; and two days afterwards they set their feet upon the French soil,—having resolved, for many obvious reasons, to quit England for a time, and settle themselves in some retired place on the Continent, where her ladyship would be out of reach of any danger, and both herself and daughter far from the sphere where gossip and scandal were so busy with their names.

Before concluding this chapter, it may perhaps be necessary to give some few explanations respecting Mr. Hawkshaw's conduct, in addition to those to which he himself had given utterance before the assembled guests at Saxondale Castle. It will be recollected that up to the moment of the scene in the conservatory at Mr. Denison's, Hawkshaw was totally unsuspicious that Juliana Farefield was the depraved and guilty heroine of Francis Paton's narrative. At the moment the Squire was entering that conservatory, he was not aware that any other persons were present: he was merely seeking its refreshing coolness after the stifling heat of the ball-room. But as he was crossing the threshold, he heard voices; and the words which Juliana was uttering at the moment, struck as a terrible revelation to his soul, making him stop short. He was literally confounded. Even if averse to hear any more, he had not the power to move away: he was transfixed to the spot. He seemed to be under the influence of a horrible night-mare: but there was nevertheless a tremendous reality in the conversation which was progressing, and every syllable of which reached his ears. The rows of stately plants and the mass of luxuriant foliage in the conservatory, concealed him from the view of Frank and Juliana; —and, rooted to the spot, he lost not a syllable that was said. Fortunate was it for him that he was thus paralysed with dismay—silenced and rendered motionless by consternation: for he was thus enabled to collect his thoughts with a certain degree of calmness, and to exercise a control over his feelings. Had he given way to a sudden paroxysm of excitement, it is possible that he would have sprung forward, and levelling the most terrific denunciations at Juliana, would have created a tremendous uproar at Mr. Denison's house. But being thus enabled to repress any such excitement, and to look with a certain calmness at the entire picture of her monstrous perfidy, his thoughts gradually settled themselves into a resolve to take a signal revenge. His love for Juliana became all in an instant changed into the deadliest hate. He himself was of so frank, honest, and confiding a disposition, that it was natural he should be led to regard with the direst aversion a being of so depraved a heart as Juliana.

Mr. Hawkshaw's determination being thus adopted, he of course felt the necessity of dissimulating to the utmost of his power towards Juliana, until the moment for wreaking his revenge should come. He experienced no animosity against young Paton: for the latter knew not at the time that Juliana was the object of Mr. Hawkshaw's love;—and even if he had known it, all that was criminal between the youth and the young lady had taken place long previously. Thus Hawkshaw's friendly conduct changed not towards the youth: but the reader will perhaps remember how at breakfast on the morning after the ball, Hawkshaw had taken the opportunity of advising him most earnestly, and in the strongest language, to shun as he would a reptile the lady who was the object of his visit into Lincolnshire. When they repaired to Mr Denison's house to dinner, Mr. Hawkshaw took an opportunity of speaking aside to that gentleman, and revealed to him all he had overheard in the conservatory on the previous evening. Mr. Denison was not merely amazed and shocked, but likewise felt himself and his family to be outraged by the circumstance that such a foul creature as Juliana should dare to frequent their dwelling as a friend and guest. Nor less was he indignant and scandalized at the idea of the terrific cheat which Juliana had contemplated to practise upon his friend Hawkshaw. Therefore Mr. Denison had willingly agreed to co-operate in Hawkshaw's design of making a tremendous exposure of the profligate young lady. Hence the conversation which took place between Mr. Denison and Frank Paton after the dinner; and hence too that letter which Mr. Denison counselled Frank to write, and which indeed he dictated. The Marquis of Eagledean was then duly informed of all that was going on; and he wrote back to say that he would be present at Saxondale Castle on the day and precisely at the hour fixed for the solemnization of the double wedding. For the nobleman, as we have already seen, conceived it to be a favourable opportunity for rescuing his nephew Lord Harold from the power of Lady Saxondale.

CHAPTER CIX.

THE CASTLEMAINES.

We must now direct the attention of our readers to the splendid mansion of the Earl of Castlemaine at Kensington, one of the fashionable suburbs of the British metropolis. It cannot be forgotten how Dr. Ferney was one night fetched hurriedly by the Earl in person to that palatial residence, in order to see the Countess, who had been taken dangerously ill after returning with her husband from a ball at the Duke of Harcourt's. It must also be remembered how the physician, after visiting the unhappy lady in the midst of the ravings of her delirium, in her own chamber, had reported to the Earl that she was in a way to become a mother.

More than two months had elapsed since that memorable night; and Lady Castlemaine had continued dangerously ill. Throughout this long interval her mind appeared to have fallen into the most alarming disorder: her brain seemed to be touched—her ravings were frequent and incoherent, oftentimes rising into frenzy, and only succeeded by the lull of an idiotic stupor. Not once during those two months had she experienced a lucid moment: or if she had, she was too much prostrated and enfeebled at the time to give audible utterance to any sane thoughts that might have collected themselves in her mind.

Dr. Ferney had called daily, with the exception of that temporary absence from London which

was caused by his visit to Saxondale Castle in respect to the mysterious death of Mabel Stewart. An eminent surgeon was likewise called in; and thus the Countess of Castlemaine had the best medical attention that could be obtained. Lord Castlemaine had continued at the mansion during the whole of that interval of two months: so that the world out-of-doors might naturally suppose him to be profoundly solicitous as to his wife's health, notwithstanding the whispered rumours which had for some years been current that they lived not happily together. But if his lordship had been habitually reserved and taciturn previous to his wife's illness, he had become still more so since that memorable night on which he learnt from Dr. Ferney's lips the certainty that her ladyship was in a way to become a mother. He had kept much to his own private apartments;—he seldom went out, scarcely even to take necessary exercise: he abstained from society —and frequently gave orders that the servants should represent him as being "not at home" when visitors called.

As a matter of course, the domestics whispered a great deal amongst themselves respecting all these matters. Lord and Lady Castlemaine had been married about seven years: but for the last four they had occupied separate chambers. Hitherto no children had resulted from their union: but now that under existing circumstances her ladyship was in a way to become a mother, and that the Earl appeared not pleased with the prospect of the responsibility of paternity, it was indeed sufficient to induce the domestics thus to canvass the affair amongst themselves. But though it was scarcely possible to avoid some unpleasant suspicion in respect to the Countess, it was still more difficult on the other hand to discover any proofs thereof, beyond the fact that she was pregnant and that for four years she and her husband had occupied distinct apartments. The conduct of Priscilla—which was the lady's Christian name—had ever appeared to be characterized by the strictest propriety: it was impossible to look around upon the circle of her acquaintance, and fix upon a single male individual who had received any distinguishing mark of her favour. Even when in society, her behaviour was equally unexceptionable. She never danced: the arm of no gay gallant ever encircled her waist in the voluptuous waltz: the eyes of no libertine were ever thus furnished with an opportunity of looking sensuously down into her own. Not one of the domestics, most of whom had been for some years in the establishment, could recollect a single incident in the Countess of Castlemaine's proceedings to afford the slightest shadow of a justification for suspecting her fair fame. Though eminently beautiful, and but in her twenty-fourth year—in the bloom and glory of womanhood—at an age and in a position when a woman might naturally be supposed to feel flattered by the incense of adulation—Lady Castlemaine had by the dignified reserve of her manners kept all idle flatterers and would be admirers at a distance. So far from displaying the slightest levity, the propriety of her conduct appeared to have been based upon that natural love of virtue which ever places a guard upon looks and language as well as upon actions. How, then, was it possible to believe that this lady had strayed into the path of error, and that her whole conduct was an immense dissimulation—a studied falsehood—a practised lie, admirably concealed under the garb of truth!

Since that night on which the Countess of Castlemaine's illness commenced, the Earl had spoken but little to Dr. Ferney. Every day he made inquiries respecting her ladyship's health—received the answer—and said no more. Every day too he paid a brief visit to the sick chamber,—sometimes twice: but in his inscrutable countenance neither Mrs. Broughton (the senior lady's-maid) nor her two junior assistants, could read what was passing in his mind. They saw that he was profoundly mournful—and that was all. They could not even tell whether this mournfulness arose on account of his wife's dangerous illness, or from any other cause. Sometimes the Earl would stand by the side of the couch when Priscilla was raving in delirium; and with arms folded across his chest, he would remain motionless, his eyes fixed upon her with an expression that none present could comprehend. But though he might possibly be drinking in with avidity every word that came from her lips when she spoke in those ravings, yet from his manner it did not seem that he was inspired by any such degree of curiosity. At other times, when the invalid lay wrapped in unconsciousness—a complete stupor of the senses—the Earl would still stand gazing upon her; and still, too, could no one comprehend whether he felt pity for her condition and hope that she would recover—or whether the settled mournfulness of his looks might be traceable to some other feeling. But on none of these occasions when he thus visited the sick-chamber, did the Countess recognize him: indeed she recognized no one. When not plunged into stupor, her thoughts seemed to be all in confusion—her mind appeared to be a wreck. One circumstance especially was noticed by Mrs. Broughton, and the two younger female dependants attached to her ladyship's own personal service. This was that Lord Castlemaine, on his visits to the room, never bent down to touch his wife's cheek with his lips—never bestowed upon her the slightest caress—never even so much as took her hand in his own.

Mrs. Broughton was too discreet to gossip with the other domestics relative to the affairs of their master and mistress. She was a woman of forty—had seen better days in earlier life—and was well brought up. She was devotedly attached to the Countess, in whose service she had been from the time of her ladyship's marriage with Lord Castlemaine. If she did not however speak upon those subjects, Mrs. Broughton nevertheless reflected often and profoundly—without however bringing her meditations to any satisfactory issue: for the whole affair seemed to be involved in a strange mystery. She knew full well that for four years the husband and wife had occupied separate apartments—that there had been a certain estrangement between them in private, although they had done their best to keep up proper appearances before the world. Beyond all doubt was it that the Countess was in a way to become a mother; and though Mrs. Broughton was astounded when the discovery was made, yet how could she possibly suspect that her mistress had gone astray? If there had been an intrigue, it could well have been kept from the knowledge of herself? Visits must have been paid

by the favoured gallant—or assignments made and kept; and if there were no visits to arrange such appointments, there must have been messages or letters. But nothing of the sort had come to Mrs. Broughton's knowledge. She never even once remembered her mistress going out alone, unless she could have been said to do so when proceeding by herself for an airing in the carriage; and then, if she had committed any imprudence or done anything suspicious, the coachman and footman in attendance on the equipage would have been certain to speak of it. They, however, in their gossippings with the other servants, had spoken to the exact contrary: and altogether poor Mrs. Broughton was as much perplexed as she was afflicted on account of her beloved mistress.

One night—about two months after the commencement of Lady Castlemaine's illness—Mrs. Broughton was sitting in the invalid's chamber, with a book in her hand, but engaged rather in her own reflections than in the contents of the volume. Her mistress was slumbering soundly; and Dr. Ferney, on paying his evening visit, had declared that there was a slight but nevertheless plainly visible improvement, both as regarded her physical health and the state of her mind. Not that she had regained complete mental self-possession; but she had gazed less wildly and less vacantly upon the physician—and he could tell by the expression of her look that there was an incipient revival of the reasoning power. Mrs. Broughton had been well pleased at this intelligence; and she was now reflecting upon it, as well as upon what circumstances might transpire when her beloved mistress should be enabled to converse rationally once more. It was half-past eleven o'clock—or perhaps even still nearer midnight: a profound silence reigned through the dwelling—for the servants of the household, always of regular habits, had been accustomed to retire still earlier than was their wont since the illness of Lady Castlemaine. A nurse had been engaged to attend upon her during her indisposition: but Mrs. Broughton usually sent her about ten o'clock to her own chamber, to snatch a couple or three hours' sleep, so that she might pass the remainder of the night in the invalid's room without so much danger of yielding to slumber as if she obtained no rest at all. Therefore it was Mrs. Broughton's practice to keep watch during the first portion of the night: and this she was doing now, on the particular occasion of which we are speaking.

The worthy woman was sitting in a large arm-chair, with the book in her hand, and her eyes fixed upon the couch where her mistress lay. The wax-candles were burning upon a table in the middle of the room, which, being spacious, they did not light completely. Presently Mrs. Broughton fancied she heard a door open in the suite of apartments to which this bed-chamber belonged, and of which it was the last. For next to the bed-chamber was a boudoir, or luxuriously appointed lounging and dressing-room: beyond that was a sitting-room, where any intimate lady-friends might be received by the mistress of the mansion when she chose to dispense with the formality of descending to the drawing-room. Beyond that sitting-room was the ante-room, thus completing the suite, and opening from a long and splendidly decorated corridor.

When Mrs. Broughton heard that door open, it immediately occurred to her that it was the nurse coming, and she therefore did not think it strange. But as several minutes elapsed and no one appeared, she began to wonder somewhat at the circumstance: for she felt assured that she had distinctly heard the sound in question,—and she was almost equally certain that it was the door between the boudoir and the sitting-room. Still she remained some few minutes longer, the thought having occurred to her that the nurse might be doing something in the boudoir. Indeed, she now distinctly heard footsteps there—and then the noise of a chair moving, as if some one had knocked against it.

Remembering that there was no light in any of those rooms, it now struck her that the nurse had come from the chamber above without a candle, and was groping her way in the dark. So Mrs. Broughton considerately rose from her chair and hastened to open the door, that the light in the bed-chamber might serve as a guide for the old nurse thither. She did not take one of the wax-candles in her hand; and just a sufficiency of light penetrated from the bed-chamber into the boudoir, when the door was opened, to make objects dimly visible in the latter place. Scarcely had Mrs. Broughton thus opened that door, when through the gloom of the boudoir she beheld the form of a man. The individual instantaneously retreated, closing the opposite door of the boudoir behind him; and Mrs. Broughton was so astounded at the circumstance, that she had not the presence of mind to follow immediately. More than a minute elapsed ere she could sufficiently recover herself to fly back to the table, snatch up a light, and hasten through the rooms: but on gaining the corridor, she beheld no one. All was still—a profound silence reigned through the mansion. She passed along the corridor until she reached the landing whence it branched off, and whence on the opposite side another corridor led to the private apartments of the Earl of Castlemaine, as described in that chapter where our readers were first introduced to the mansion.

Mrs. Broughton stood for a few moments in the middle of that landing, listening with suspended breath; but no sound met her ears. Should she raise an alarm that there was some stranger in the house? No: for the circumstance would at once seem to stamp with conviction the dim and vague suspicions already floating about amongst the inmates of the dwelling in respect to her beloved mistress. Besides, she did not imagine for a moment that the intruder had entered on a plundering expedition: she felt assured that he was no evil-intentioned burglar;—for brief and transitory though the glimpse was which she had obtained of him in the gloom of the boudoir, she had nevertheless seen enough to judge that he was a gentleman. This was the impression made upon her mind; and though, if questioned, she could not have described anything definite as to his appearance—much less a single feature of his face—yet she knew that in respect to her general idea of his being well dressed she was not mistaken.

She retraced her way to the bed-chamber; and soon afterwards the old nurse made her appearance. Mrs. Broughton had not the slightest inclination

for sleep, and though she betrayed not her feelings to the nurse, she notwithstanding felt too much troubled and uneasy in her mind to seek the solitude of her own chamber. She accordingly resumed her seat in the sick room, remarking to the nurse that not feeling tired, she would sit up a little longer. Whether it were that the nurse herself was unrefreshed by her own interval of sleep—or whether it were that she thought that as Mrs. Broughton was there, she might just as well indulge in another nap—we cannot take ti upon ourselves to decide. Certain however was it that the old woman did gradually doze off in her chair; while, on the other hand Mrs. Broughton remained wide awake. Indeed, she had never in her life felt a greater disinclination to close her eyes than on this present occasion. She was literally haunted by the figure she had seen; and for the first time since the discovery that Lady Castlemaine was in a way to become a mother, did Mrs. Broughton experience a very serious misgiving as to the chastity of her mistress. Hitherto the good woman had done her best to banish everything savouring of suspicion from her mind: but now she felt this suspicion fastening itself upon her in a manner that defied resistance—tightening its hold—clinging to her with a tenacity which it was impossible to shake off.

Was the Countess, then, really guilty? had she been in the habit of receiving the stealthy and nocturnal visits of some paramour? did a favoured gallant find means, totally unsuspected by the household, to introduce himself into the mansion and thread his way to her ladyship's chamber? was some secret and cunningly devised signal, incomprehensible to all but the guilty pair themselves, the method by which the lover had on former occasions known when to seek the lady's bower? and was the visit of this night to be accounted for by the supposition that not having seen that signal, whatever it might be, for two months past, he had resolved,

in the desperation of suspense and the ardour of love, to penetrate into the mansion at all risks and endeavour to ascertain for himself the cause of that cessation of the signal?

When once a suspicion settles in the mind, it speedily engenders a host of conjectures which appear to furnish the most feasible means of clearing up a mystery. So was it in Mrs. Broughton's case now; and hence all those imaginings and speculations which we have just recorded. But who could the favoured gallant be that he did not know of the lady's illness and thus be aware of the reason why the love-signal ceased to be given? or if he were informed of that illness, how was it that he proved himself rash or indiscreet enough thus to think of penetrating to a sick chamber where he might naturally suppose there were watchers by the invalid's bedside? These questions certainly appeared difficult to answer,—unless the solution was to be found in the belief that the gallant *was* aware of the illness, and that rendered almost frenzied by grief and maddened by the extent of his love, he had determined to risk everything in order to obtain an opportunity of throwing a single look upon the object of his adoration. But poor Mrs. Broughton was profoundly shocked and afflicted when she found herself compelled to come to such conclusions as these, and to settle down in the conviction that her beloved mistress had indeed strayed into the path of error.

The time-piece on the mantel in the boudoir adjoining proclaimed the hour of one in the morning. The old nurse was dozing in her chair: nay, more than dozing—she was fast asleep. Lady Castlemaine was still wrapped in profound slumber: she was passing the best night she had yet experienced since the date of her illness. Mrs. Broughton was still wide awake—and still felt not the slightest inclination to close her eyes or lie down. One of the wax-candles, having burnt into its socket, had just gone out; and the flickering of the other reminded the good woman that it would speedily share the fate of its companion. She rose from her seat to fetch another pair of lights from the toilet-table, when she was suddenly startled by hearing the door open. She looked hastily around; and just at the very instant that the second candle was expiring in its socket, she caught a glimpse of the figure of a man upon the threshold. The next moment she was in total darkness: she heard the door close again—a scream rose to her very lips—but she repressed it; and immediately recovering her self-possession, was mechanically hastening in pursuit of the intruder, when she fell against the nurse, who woke up with a start.

"Hush—not a word—it is I!" said Mrs. Broughton, fearing that the old woman might give vent to an ejaculation of alarm, and thus disturb the Countess.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked the nurse, in a sleepy voice. "I fancy you have been dozing, and tumbled out of your chair. I have been awake the whole time."

"Then perhaps you saw the candles go out," said Mrs. Broughton, who knew full well how much reliance was to be placed upon the old nurse's assertion. "But we will soon have others."

The fresh candles were accordingly lighted; and Mrs. Broughton, taking one of them, said that she should go and lie down on the sofa in the sitting-room. The nurse asked why she did not go to bed:—but the lady's-maid merely gave some evasive answer, and issued forth from the sick chamber. She passed through the boudoir—she entered the sitting-room—and seating herself there, she blew out the light, with the determination of watching in the dark to ascertain if the intruder should penetrate to that suite of rooms any more,—in which case she had made up her mind to speak to him, and remonstrate in the most earnest manner against his insensate proceedings, by which her mistress might be seriously compromised if not actually ruined. While thus seated upon that sofa in the dark, Mrs. Broughton taxed her memory to the extremest verge, in order to gather if possible something like a definite impression of the countenance of that individual whom she had seen in the doorway, and who she of course felt assured must be the same whose flitting form she had previously caught a glimpse of in the boudoir. But she could fashion to herself no idea of what that face was like: she had just seen it—and *only* just seen it: for a swift brief moment had her eyes been turned upon it, and then the abrupt extinction of the candle had enveloped the scene in darkness. She was therefore compelled to come to the conclusion that if it had been the face of her own husband from the tomb, or of any one whom she was in the habit of seeing every day and therefore familiarly acquainted with, she would not have recognized it. She sincerely hoped that the intruder would come back again while she remained there, that she might have the opportunity of putting an end to his visits altogether. She saw that if he should come at a time when she was not there, and should be discovered, a terrific explosion would ensue. She had no longer any doubt—no, not the slightest—as to the frailty of her mistress; and being a woman of very strict principles, she was both shocked and pained at the thought that after all the endeavours to persuade herself into a belief of Lady Castlemaine's immaculate virtue, she should thus find herself so cruelly deceived. She even seriously reflected that it would be a duty which she owed herself to leave the Countess's service: but as a matter of course she did not think of taking such a step until her ladyship should be thoroughly restored to convalescence.

An hour passed—the time-piece struck two—and there was no symptom of any farther intrusion. Still Mrs. Broughton resolved to sit up a little longer. She was not wearied, nor was she sleepy. The activity of her thoughts, so painfully excited, kept away all sense of fatigue and all inclination to slumber. Nor was she cold: indeed the night was so warm, although it was late in September, that the fires in the suite of rooms had been suffered to go out some hours back. Again did Mrs. Broughton give way to her reflections with regard to the incidents of this night. Thus another hour passed—it was now three in the morning—all continued silent—and therefore, feeling assured that the intruder would not penetrate thither again on the present occasion, she retired to her own chamber.

CHAPTER CX.

MORE MYSTERIES.

It was about noon on the following day, and Lady Castlemaine was once more plunged in a profound sleep,—when the Earl paid his usual visit. Only Mrs. Broughton happened to be in attendance at the time; and in answer to his lordship's questions, she said that the Countess had slept soundly for the greater portion of the night—but that, according to the nurse's report, she had grown restless, feverish, and excited towards morning, though her ravings were much less violent and much less incoherent than they yet had been. The Earl, having received this intelligence, said nothing more; but shutting himself up in his wonted taciturnity, stood by the side of the couch with his eyes fixed upon the pale features of his sleeping wife. Gradually, and as if quite unconsciously on his part, he folded his arms across his chest, and then remained motionless as a statue. But the mournfulness of his countenance deepened into a gloom which became settled there; and his features were clouded with inscrutable thoughts. He has previously been described as a man of dark complexion, with coal black hair, and eyes to match; and there is always something more terrible in the aspect of such a countenance as this, when shrouded in gloom, than in one of any other style.

Mrs. Broughton, hearing the time-piece strike, found that it was twelve o'clock; and thinking that the Countess would soon awake, when it would be necessary to administer some medicine which Dr. Ferney had prescribed on the previous day, she looked about in search of the bottle containing the mixture. It was empty—and she quitted the chamber to go and look in the anteroom if a fresh supply had been sent from the chemist's,—in which case she would be sure to find it there. It was not to be seen; and as neither the nurse nor the two younger lady's-maids happened to be near at the moment, Mrs. Broughton, to save time, hurried down stairs to make an inquiry of the hall-porter, or else to send some one to the apothecary's shop. A few minutes sufficed for her purpose; and on returning to the sick chamber, she entered so noiselessly—without however any unusual degree of precaution—that the Earl of Castlemaine did not hear either the door opening or her footsteps.

"Can it be? is it possible that thou should'st have thus fallen away from the path of virtue and yielded thyself up to a paramour? Thou may'st have ceased to love me—and it may be my fault that thou hast done so: but yet—but yet——"

Here Mrs. Broughton,—who had been quite an involuntary ear-witness of the words wherein the Earl slowly and mournfully apostrophized his sleeping wife,—purposely moved a chair somewhat roughly that he might be made aware of her presence; for she did not choose to suffer him to go on speaking in the belief that he was alone in that chamber. But never afterwards did the woman forget the fierce abruptness with which the Earl turned round upon her—the dark and terrible scowl which sprang up on his countenance, rendering it for the moment almost diabolic in its expression—or the violence with which he clutched her by the arm, and bending his piercing black eyes upon her, said, "You were listening!"

"Not intentionally, my lord," she answered, with an almost instantaneous recovery of her self-possession: for she was indignant at the charge.

"Well—unintentionally then," he continued, still looking fiercely and deeply down into her eyes, as if to penetrate to her very soul. "But you heard what I said——Yes, I know that I was speaking aloud ——Fool that I was to be thus incautious—thus unguarded! Mrs. Broughton," he added quickly, "you are a good woman—a trustworthy woman! Will you swear to me, as if you were answering to your God, that you will never reveal to a soul what you have just heard issue from my lips?"

"My lord," responded Mrs. Broughton, "I like not such an adjuration as that——"

"Ah, but you shall swear! you shall swear!" interrupted the nobleman, in a low hoarse voice, while his countenance became lived with rage. "You shall swear—or, by heaven! I will kill you!" —and the hand which still clutched the woman's arm, tightened about it as if it were in an iron vice; and the blue mark remained for days afterwards.

"My lord, making allowance for the excitement of your feelings," she said, "I faithfully and solemnly promise you that I will never divulge the words you uttered ere now."

The Earl of Castlemaine gazed intensely upon her for nearly a minute, as if to satisfy himself that he could believe her; and then he abruptly said, "Enough! I put faith in you. I will not offer you gold now as a bribe to secrecy; for it would lessen the solemnity of the assurance you have given me. But rely upon my generosity. Yes—you will keep the secret; for my honour is concerned!"—and the words came thick and low from his throat, while the expression of his countenance was inscrutably terrible.

He then turned abruptly away and quitted the room, leaving Mrs. Broughton to reflect upon all that had taken place. Whatsoever doubts—if any —had still remained in her mind, as to the frailty of the Countess of Castlemaine, after the occurrences of the preceding night, they were now all completely dissipated, since the revelation which the Earl had made of a bitter consciousness of his own dishonour. But how was it that he had not either sent forth the guilty woman from the house, or else quitted it himself, the moment he made the first discovery of her shame?—and how was it that he thus regularly visited the invalid day after day, and that before the world he maintained the appearance of a satisfied husband? Was it that he preferred keeping his dishonour secret, even though thereby compelled to maintain certain terms with the authoress of it? —or was it that he only waited till she should be recovered, in order to wreak some signal vengeance? No: it was not this latter hypothesis which would account for the Earl's conduct; for were it so, he would not visit the chamber of his guilty wife—he would not have apostrophized her in that mournful manner which Mrs. Broughton had overheard—he would not have so solemnly adjured her to secrecy, with the intimation that his honour was at stake. It must therefore be the former hypothesis which must be the correct one; and it was to maintain *that honour* untarnished in the eyes of the world,

and to save his proud name from humiliation, that he had resolved upon the sacrifice of all other feelings. At least so thought the worthy lady's-maid; and as she gazed upon the pale countenance of her sleeping mistress, she also said, "Is it possible that, with virtue's semblance, you can be so guilty?"

When night came, Mrs. Broughton told the nurse that she need not trouble herself to take her turn till between two and three in the morning, as she herself intended to remain with her mistress until a later hour than usual, in consequence of certain instructions which Dr. Ferney had given her. The pretext was not true; but the deception was venial, besides being insignificant, inasmuch as the lady's-maid had a good object in view. The reader can understand that this was to fulfil her intention of the previous night; and if the intruder should penetrate to those chambers, to remonstrate or threaten so effectually as to put an end to his visits. The old nurse was by no means sorry to find herself allowed an extra hour or two for sleep that night; and when she had quitted the bed-chamber, Mrs. Broughton sat down, resolved to keep her ears ready to catch the slightest sound of an opening door. She did not dare go and place herself in either of the other rooms in the dark, to intercept the intruder, should he come; because it was absolutely necessary for her to remain watching near the bed in which her mistress lay, so as to be at hand for any requisite ministrations. Neither had she chosen to leave the old nurse in the bed-chamber while she stationed herself elsewhere, for fear lest it should seem odd to the woman that she thus on two nights running adopted the same course. So she remained where she was, having sent the nurse to bed, to await whatsoever might transpire.

Lady Castlemaine slept as tranquilly as she had done on the preceding night; for a marked improvement had taken place in her condition within the last two days. Eleven o'clock struck——another hour passed, and midnight was proclaimed by the silver voice of the time-piece in the boudoir. Mrs. Broughton experienced a deep suspense; for she reflected that if her lady's paramour did purpose to return at all, the moment must be near at hand. Scarcely had she made this reflection, when she distinctly heard a door open somewhere in the suite of apartments; and rising from her seat, she went and posted herself close by the door of the bed-chamber, so that the instant it should open she might be at hand to address the intruder. But all was now still: not a sound reached her ears. She remained upwards of five minutes in that position: no one came—nothing more was heard. Yet she was certain that she *had* heard a door open. Should she take a light and go and see if any one were in either of the rooms? No: for the moment she might open the chamber-door with a candle, it would be the means of scaring the intruder away; and this was not what she wanted. Should she steal forth in the dark and listen, so that if the intruder was lurking about,—watching for a particular opportunity, or concealed behind any of the draperies,—she might catch some sound to reveal his whereabouts, and thus her objects would be answered?

Having hastily assured herself that her mistress was still slumbering deeply and tranquilly, she extinguished the candles, so that on opening the door no light might shine forth; and treading as noiselessly as a stealing ghost over the thick carpets, careful also to prevent her dress from giving forth the slightest rustle, Mrs. Broughton passed through the boudoir and entered the sitting-room. A pitchy darkness prevailed here: for the thick curtains were drawn over the windows. Every other moment she stopped and listened: but she heard nothing, save the palpitation of her own heart under the influence of anxious suspense. Gradually she passed on through the inky darkness, to the sofa where she sat on the preceding night. Here she resolved to sit down again, and tarry in that room for at least ten minutes, which interval was the outside that she dared remain away from the invalid's chamber. But she thought that if the stealthy-entering paramour were there at all, he would certainly make a move within that space of time; and she would at once accost him—she would clutch him by the arm—and she would compel him to remain, while she adjured him, if he had any regard for her mistress, that he would not compromise her more seriously than he had already done.

So noiselessly and carefully had Mrs. Broughton threaded her way to the sofa, that if there had been a dozen persons concealed in the room, and each possessed of the sharpest ears, not one of them would have caught the slightest sound to betray her stealthy presence. With the same caution was she gradually sinking towards a sitting posture on the sofa, when her hand suddenly came in contact with *another* hand—a hand that was cold as ice; and at the same instant a low sepulchral groan sounded close by her ear. Her hand was snatched away as if it had come in contact with a reptile coiled up on the sofa; and she sank back in the stupor of consternation. Without actually falling into a swoon, she was for more than a minute in a state bordering upon unconsciousness: it was a paralysis of the senses. That sudden contact with the ice-cold hand—that hollow moan seeming to issue from the throat of the troubled dead—was indeed sufficient to produce this overpowering effect. It was an awful terror that all in an instant had smitten her. But as she slowly regained her self-possession, her courage revived sufficiently for her to thrust forth her arm to ascertain if any one were still seated by her side: but nothing encountered her touch—naught but the impalpable air of inky darkness. Still more did her fortitude return: she hastily groped her way back to the bed-chamber—she lighted the wax-candles—and having satisfied herself by a glance that her mistress was still sleeping, she took one of the lights and proceeded to search the other rooms. She passed through the boudoir—no one was there: she entered the sitting-room—no living being met her view: she looked behind all the draperies—still no one! She passed into the ante-room: and there her fruitless search ended.

Instinctively, as she returned into the sitting-room, her glance was thrown again towards that sofa where she had encountered the death-cold hand and heard the hollow moan; and she perceived something white lying upon the carpet. She hastened forward to pick it up. It was a note, the contents of which were brief, and in the handwriting of the Countess. Without pausing to consider whether there were any indiscretion in the

act, Mrs. Broughton read that note, which was thus worded:—

"You know that I love you—love you adoringly, passionately! Wherefore should you write in such a desponding manner, as if you doubted the sincerity of my affection? Yes—I repeat that I love you—*you* only; and heaven grant that this assurance may render you happy! Pray do not in future mistrust this love of mine: pray do not, either by words spoken or written, manifest a distrust of that heart which is wholly yours. You know not the unhappiness you cause me when you thus seem to doubt my affection. If I were acquainted with a language more potent than that which I now use to give you these assurances, believe me I would adopt it.

"Ever thine,

"PRISCILLA."

This letter had no date, and was not addressed to any one by name. It had no doubt been forwarded in an envelope, which was not now with it. Mrs. Broughton, as above stated, had hastened to read its contents without pausing to reflect whether she were justified in doing so: but she had acted on the spur of the moment—and under all circumstances, when she came to think of the proceeding, she could not blame herself for it.

She had found the note close by the sofa where a few minutes back she was thrown into such an awful consternation; she was well assured that it was not there when at about ten o'clock she had come to the rooms, or else she could not have failed to perceive it. Or even if she had by any chance happened to overlook it,—the nurse, when passing that way with a candle, would most probably have seen it. Everything considered, it was tolerably evident that it had been dropped there some time during the two hours which had elapsed since she herself had returned to the bedchamber after her supper, and when she dismissed the nurse. But might it not have been dropped by that individual whose hand she had touched and whose moan she had heard? was there indeed any doubt as to such being the case? Terror-stricken as she had been at first, she did not now entertain the idea that it was a preternatural visitant whom she had encountered on that sofa. but was he not the intruder whom she had sought—the Countess of Castlemaine's paramour?

Ah! then he must indeed love her very much that he thus perseveringly sought the suite of apartments where she lay, and that he actually brought with him one of her own letters—a letter which perhaps he had kept treasured next to his heart! But was he, after all, unaware of the very serious nature of her illness? did he come to reproach her for an imgined want of affection? had he brought this letter with him to remind her of the assurances of love which at some time she had vouchsafed? and was he, on making his stealthy entrance into that room, so overcome by his feelings that he had found himself compelled to find his way to the sofa to sit down and calm them?

Such was the series of rapid questions which Mrs. Broughton asked herself, as she still stood with the letter in one hand and the wax-light in the other. And then, too, another query suggested itself. How was it that when the intruder had suddenly felt her hand come in contact with his own, he had not abruptly started up in terror of discovery, instead of giving vent to that deep sound of lamentation? That he had quickly after made a retreat, was evident enough: but what must he have thought of the contact of that hand? whose must he have supposed it to be? and what would his feelings be—what would he do, when he came to discover that the letter had been left behind?

There was much in the whole occurrence which Mrs. Broughton could not understand, and which seemed to be involved in some degree of mystery. But this letter which had so strangely fallen into her possession, and which afforded another corroboration of the Countess of Castlemaine's guilt—what could she do with it? Her first impulse was to burn it: on second thoughts, however, she resolved to keep it, so that if under any circumstances it should be asked for, she might produce it, and thus satisfy those interested in the revelation it contained, that it had not fallen into hands which would make an unworthy use of it. She accordingly concealed it about her person; and then retraced her way into the bed-chamber. She experienced no other adventure on this night; and when relieved from her vigil by the appearance of the nurse, betook herself to her own chamber, where she still pondered for some little time on what had occurred ere sleep visited her eyes.

On the following day the Countess of Castlemaine's condition was so much improved, that Dr. Ferney, when he called, assured Mrs. Broughton that in a very short time her ladyship would again become conscious of what was passing around her. On the night that followed, nothing particular occurred, though Mrs. Broughton kept watch: no tell-tale sound met her ears—there was no intrusion The next day the Countess was still better; and for a few minutes she evidently recognized Mrs Broughton, though she was unable to utter an intelligible word. The next ensuing night passed like the preceding one, without intrusion; and the worthy lady's-maid thought to herself that in consequence of the loss of the letter, the Countess's paramour did not dare again venture within those walls,—not knowing into whose hands it had fallen, or what ambush might be laid to entrap him. On the following day Lady Castlemaine, on awaking from a long and refreshing slumber, appeared to have entirely recovered the possession of her intellect, with the faculties of reason and discrimination. Mrs. Broughton was alone in the chamber at the time that the Countess thus woke up. At first the invalid gazed long and earnestly upon her faithful dependant: then she stretched forth her hand, as if perfectly conscious that she had been the object of the kindest and most unwearied ministrations; and for some minutes she retained Mrs. Broughton's hand in her own. But still she spoke not, though her eyes seemed to ask many questions which the brain was suggesting. Closing those eyes for several minutes, the Countess pressed her hand to her brow, and was evidently exerting all her power to collect her ideas and to steady her thoughts. The compassionate Mrs. Broughton felt a sad tightening at the heart; for she knew that the period for explanations was at hand, and her ladyship must soon become aware—even if she were not already thinking of it—that her condition in the way of maternity was known to her husband.

"Broughton," said the Countess, in a faint weak voice, as she slowly removed her hand from her

brow, and gazed up at the lady's-maid with those dark eyes which were always of a soft melancholy, but which were now more plaintively mournful than ever,—"I have been very ill, have I not? Pray tell me how long."

"You must not excite yourself, my lady," responded Mrs. Broughton; but knowing that with invalids it is always better to relieve them from suspense as speedily as possible, she added, "Do not be frightened - but you have been ill for several weeks—indeed altogether more than two months."

"So long as that," murmured the Countess, and once more did she fall into silent reflection.

The lady's-maid stood contemplating that countenance which, though pale and wan with illness, was still so beautiful, and to which that very illness had imparted an expression of the most touching interest; and it really seemed difficult to believe in her guilt, if that fair face were to be regarded as a true index of the mind. But on the other hand, in the presence of all the circumstances which crowded upon Mrs. Broughton's memory, how could she possibly believe the Countess to be innocent?

"Tell me," said her ladyship, again speaking in her low faint voice, but with a visible suspense and anxiety upon her face, "what has been the matter with me?—tell me everything that you think may interest me—do not make me talk too much—you yourself can judge whatsoever I may desire to know."

"Perhaps your ladyship does not remember," said Mrs. Broughton, "how you were suddenly taken ill on returning from the Duke of Harcourt's?"

"Yes—I do recollect it now," observed the Countess.

"Ladies, you know," continued Mrs. Broughton, "when in a particular situation are liable to such attacks——But your ladyship did not tell me of your condition——"

"No: I did not—I did not," said the Countess, with a strange look, which it did Mrs. Broughton harm to behold: for it appeared to be the evidence of conscious guilt. "The Earl——"

And then the Countess stopped short, and a blush appeared upon the cheeks that a moment before were so colourless and pale.

"His lordship seemed much astonished," continued Mrs. Broughton; "for he assisted me to disapparel your ladyship on that night you were seized with such a sudden illness. Dr. Ferney was instantaneously sent for——"

"What must he think? what must they both think?" murmured the Countess, as if in a dying voice, but the accents of which were audible to her dependant. "Go on, Broughton—go on," she said with a visible shudder: but the next moment a strange expression of mingled placidity and firmness appeared upon her countenance—an expression such as an innocent person might be expected to assume; or which, on the other hand, might be put on by a guilty one when suddenly taking a resolve to meet a crisis with a bold effrontery.

"His lordship has visited this chamber every day," continued Mrs. Broughton, —"sometimes twice."

"Thank heaven! God be thanked!" murmured the Countess: and now her features were lighted up with the radiance of exultation. "Has he looked kind? has he spoken kindly?" she asked: but the next instant appearing angry with herself that she had put such questions, she hastily added, "Of course he has—of course he has! He is my husband—he feels for me. He has visited the chamber —sometimes twice a day, you said, Broughton—did you not?—sometimes twice a day?"

"Yes, my lady," was the response.

"Go on—tell me anything else you think I may be interested in knowing. More than two months' illness, and to be unconscious all the time——Oh, it is such a blank to fill up! and so many circumstances may have happened! so much may occur in such a space!——But who has sat up with me at night?"

It struck Mrs. Broughton that the Countess, as she somewhat abruptly put this question, surveyed her with a peculiar and penetrating look, as if she were deeply conscious of the possibility—aye more—the *probability*, that there had been intrusions of a suspicious character in that suite of apartments. It was natural that Mrs. Broughton, knowing what she did, should thus interpret that look on Priscilla's part: but she hesitated for a few moments whether to touch upon so delicate and disagreeable a topic on the present occasion. She feared to excite the invalid who was so weak and feeble, and who she thought had already been talking too much. But as she cast her looks rapidly upon the Countess, she saw that her features expressed an evident suspense; and she was therefore led to the conclusion that it would perhaps be more prudent to tell her at once what must be told sooner or later, and which so long as it remained untold, would only be keeping her ladyship's mind in a state of anxiety and uncertainty. In short Mrs. Broughton considered it to be best to put her ladyship out of suspense as soon as possible.

"A nurse has been engaged to assist me and the maids in attending upon your ladyship: but I," added Mrs. Broughton pointedly, "have considered it to be my duty to watch in your ladyship's room for the first portion of the night."

"You are very good, Broughton," replied the Countess: then fixing her eyes earnestly on her dependant, she said in a firmer voice than before, "I know you have something to tell me—I see that there is something on your mind. You need not maintain any reserve."

"Well, I am glad your ladyship affords me this opportunity of speaking frankly," rejoined Mrs. Broughton. "The truth is, I have been sorely troubled—rendered very uneasy, and even alarmed——"

"Do not use any prefatory remarks," interrupted the Countess: "tell me candidly at once what it is that has troubled and alarmed you:"—and again were the eyes of Lady Castlemaine fixed earnestly and penetratingly upon her dependant.

"Ah, my lady!" said the latter, in a low voice but full of emotion, "surely, surely you can conjecture the cause of that uneasiness and apprehension? you do not wish me to be thoroughly explicit, and enter into minute details?"

"I wish you, Broughton," replied the Countess, "to be as explicit as truth requires, and as if you were telling me something which you have no reason to suppose that I can either foresee or suspect:"—and again was there a remarkable firmness in Pris-

cilla's voice, and a strange expression of courageous resolve in her looks.

"Your ladyship commands—and I obey," replied Mrs. Broughton. "Instrusive steps have penetrated into your ladyship's suite of apartments—I have heard them—twice have I caught a glimpse of the figure of some gentleman——"

"And that gentleman?" said the Countess, with a most singular and incomprehensible look; while, at the same time, the carnation tinge again appeared upon the cheeks that illness had left so pale.

"I know not who he is, my lady," answered Mrs. Broughton: "but I endeavoured to obtain an opportunity of speaking to him. Do not imagine that it was through any impertinent curiosity on my part: for I was pained and afflicted——Oh, I cannot tell you how much!—and I was anxious to warn that gentleman of his imprudence—his rashness—his most unjustifiable indiscretion——excuse these harsh terms——"

"Yes—I can excuse them," said her ladyship: and still again was the expression of her countenance so singular that Mrs. Broughton knew not how to interpret it. "But do not be pained and afflicted on my account——"

"Ah! my lady, if you have indeed resolved that for the future," exclaimed Mrs. Broughton, "there shall be no more of——"

"Spare unnecessary observations," interrupted the Countess: "I have already told you not to make me talk too much. But the nurse and the maids—were they aware of the presence of that intruder, as you have denominated him?"

"No—heaven forbid!" ejaculated Mrs. Broughton warmly.

"Then I am of course to understand that you have not mentioned the circumstance to any one—that the Earl——"

"Again I say, heaven forbid!" cried the good woman, more and more bewildered what to think of the strangeness of her lady's manner, but fearing that it arose from the hardihood of a depravity which had been so long glossed over by the impenetrable veil of dissimulation.

"I know full well, my dear Broughton," resumed the Countess, looking steadily up from her pillow at her dependant, "that all these things must appear very strange to you, and very suspicious: but I beseech you not to think ill of me."

Mrs. Broughton made no reply. She was a woman of truth: she could not give a satisfactory answer to the Countess of Castlemaine's remark—and she did not choose to put forth an evasion or a falsehood.

"I see that you do suspect me—yes, you suspect me!" exclaimed her ladyship, now displaying a sudden excitement. "But however, no matter—you will soon think very differently. I must not talk any longer now: I fear that I have already been speaking too much."

"You have—you have," said Mrs. Broughton. "Let me entreat that your ladyship will compose yourself to slumber, if possible."

The Countess gave no answer: the tears were now trickling from her eyes—and she raised her kerchief to her face. Mrs. Broughton was melted at the sight; but fearful that if she said another word to prolong the discourse it would only cause the invalid to experience a relapse, she turned away from the couch. A few minutes afterwards she approached it gently again, and perceived that the invalid slept—or at least that her eyes were closed, and the expression of her countenance was calm and tranquil as if slumber enwrapped her.

Mrs. Broughton sat herself down to reflect upon the dialogue which had just taken place; and when she thought of those peculiar looks which the Countess had fixed upon her, and that singularity of expression which her features had three or four times worn, she felt bewildered—she knew not what to think—she saw that there was some mystery which yet remained to be fathomed. Could it be possible that, after all, the Countess was innocent? On the other hand, how could this innocence be reconciled with all the circumstances which had come to Mrs. Broughton's knowledge? Even if the intrusion of the unknown were altogether put out of the question, had not the Earl himself proclaimed his wife's frailty and his own dishonour? Therefore, whatsoever mystery there might be to clear up, how was it possible for the purity of the Countess of Castlemaine to be made apparent? She was in a way to become a mother—of *this* there was no doubt: the Earl had accused her of guilt in his apostrophe to her when she slept—*this* was also an established fact. How, then, could she be innocent?

While Mrs. Broughton was thus giving way to her reflections, the Earl of Castlemaine entered the bed-chamber. The quick look which he flung towards the couch, showed him that his wife slept; and then in a whispering voice he asked Mrs. Broughton whether her condition, physically and mentally, was still improving.

"Her ladyship is much better, my lord," responded the woman, likewise speaking in a low whisper; "and she has conversed with me for at least half-an-hour in the most rational and collected manner. But becoming exhausted, her ladyship soon sank off into that slumber which she is enjoying now."

The Earl appeared to reflect for a few moments, and then abruptly beckoned Mrs. Broughton to follow him into the boudoir,—where, looking her full in the face, he said in a somewhat peremptory manner, "Have the goodness to tell me what has passed between her ladyship and yourself."

"I must beg your lordship to understand," was Mrs. Broughton's firm reply, "that I am averse at any time to repeat conversations."

"But in the present instance," said the Earl, evidently staggered by this unexpected response, "you will see the necessity——"

"My lord," rejoined Mrs. Broughton, "I can see no necessity to mix myself up in the private affairs of my master and mistress."

The Earl bit his lip, and a dark scowl appeared upon his countenance: for a moment, too, he bent a menacing look upon the lady's-maid—but though her demeanour was perfectly respectful and totally devoid of effrontery, she displayed no signs of being intimidated. Lord Castlemaine turned abruptly away, and passed once more into the bed-chamber. Mrs. Broughton did not on this occasion follow him thither. It naturally occurred to her that as he had endeavoured to seek certain explanations at her hands, but had received them not—he was now bent on obtaining them from his wife when she

should awake. At such a scene she did not choose to be present. So she sat herself down in the boudoir; and as the two assistant-damsels almost immediately made their appearance, to see if their services were required, she bade them withdraw for the present.

But let us follow the Earl of Castlemaine into her ladyship's chamber. He approached the bed, in which she was still slumbering tranquilly Whether it were in consequence of returning health, or from a lingering excitement in her soul after the conversation with Mrs. Broughton, we cannot say: but certain it is there was the slight tint of the rose upon her cheeks—not hectic—it was delicate and gradually merging into the surrounding marble fairness of the complexion. She looked sweetly beautiful—touchingly, pathetically interesting. The dark fringes of the eyelids rested upon the cheeks: the lips, slightly apart as the regular respirations came through them, afforded a glimpse of the pearly teeth between their coral lines;—while the condition of the drapery partially displayed a bosom as white as snow.

The Earl gazed upon the countenance of his wife with a mingling of mournfulness and rancour in his looks. He seemed to deplore that fall from virtue which he felt had dishonoured and outraged him: but not a word escaped his lips. Nor is it possible to analyse the feelings which were then agitating in the heart of that man whose countenance so seldom betrayed what was passing in his soul—and when it did, betrayed so little. Suddenly the Countess opened her eyes wide, and with a slight but quick movement of the form, as if startled from some dream into complete wakefulness.

"Stephen—dearest Stephen!" she cried, extending her arms towards him: but as if seized with an unconquerable loathing and disgust, he turned quickly away and fled from the chamber.

He passed rapidly through the boudoir without appearing to notice that Mrs. Broughton was there; and she, immediately supposing that her mistress was awake and that something unpleasant had occurred between them, re-entered the bed-chamber. The Countess was weeping—her kerchief was to her eyes—and she did not at once perceive that her faithful dependant had returned to the room. But suddenly wiping away her tears, and now noticing Mrs. Broughton's presence, she said, "Give me my writing-desk—I must pen a few lines to the Earl."

"My lady, it is impossible!" responded Mrs. Broughton: "you are too weak—this excitement will be the death of your ladyship!"

"No, no," she said impatiently: "I shall be strong enough to write a few lines—only a few lines! I insist that you give me my desk."

Still Mrs. Broughton hesitated: but the Countess repeated her order with so much hysterical petulance, that the worthy woman thought she would be doing more harm by the refusal than with the compliance. She accordingly fetched the writing-desk from the boudoir; and opening it, placed it on the bed in the most convenient manner for the Countess to make use of it. Her ladyship endeavoured to raise herself from the pillow—but sank back exhausted. Again, at the expiration of a few minutes—and notwithstanding her attendant's earnest remonstrances—she made another attempt, but could not succeed. Then a film appeared to come over her eyes; and raising her hand to her brow, she said, "I feel faint and ill—I cannot write—hasten you to the Earl—and tell him——"

But she could not terminate the sentence: the effort she had made to rise had overpowered her—and she fell into a deep swoon.

For three days the Countess of Castlemaine experienced a complete relapse, both physically and mentally; and it was not till the fourth morning that consciousness again returned, and that she regained the command of her mental faculties.

CHAPTER CXI.

CHIFFIN'S NARRATIVE.

It was about ten o'clock at night, that Chiffin the Cannibal entered a low public-house in one of the vilest streets in Spitalfields. He was evidently well known to the man who kept this boozing-ken; and after exchanging with him a few words of familar greeting, he passed into a private room at the back part of the premises. Some liquor he had ordered was served up; and having lighted his pipe, he patiently awaited the arrival of a person whom he expected to meet him there. Nor was he kept waiting long: for in about five minutes the door opened, and Tony Wilkins made his appearance.

"Well," demanded the Cannibal, "what have you brought?"

"Nothink," was the reply. "Old Sol says there is never a letter for you come to the *Goat*."

"This is deuced odd," said Chiffin, in a musing tone: "she promised she would write to me—and she's too good a customer for me to let slip through my hands."

"Who are you speaking of?" asked Tony Wilkins.

"Never do you trouble yourself," was the Cannibal's growling response: but as the reader may suppose, he had Lady Saxondale in his mind. "And old Sol says that there's no letter come for me, does he?"

"That's what he says," rejoined Wilkins, who had also lighted his pipe, and had tasted the liquor with which the Cannibal was treating him. "He told me as how he had heerd from you, and that I was to come and meet you at this here place and at this here hour. So here I be."

"I wonder whether that old Sol is humbugging or not," said Chiffin, again speaking in a musing manner. "But no—he can't be: the letter would be of no use to him—and though I'm under a cloud just now, it will soon blow over; and so as I shall be able to visit the *Goat* again, he wouldn't dare play me any trick."

"I don't know that," said Wilkins. "I have never had much of an opinion of Solomon Patch. Money is all he cares about."

"To be sure," observed Chiffin; "and he would do anything for the blunt. But so would we all. And what does he say about the detectives?"

"He says that it wouldn't be safe for you to come near the *Goat* yet; as he is quite sure that one of them chaps in plain clothes has been looking in at the place three or four times since you did that job about Madge Somers. And I too," continued Tony, after a brief pause, during which he

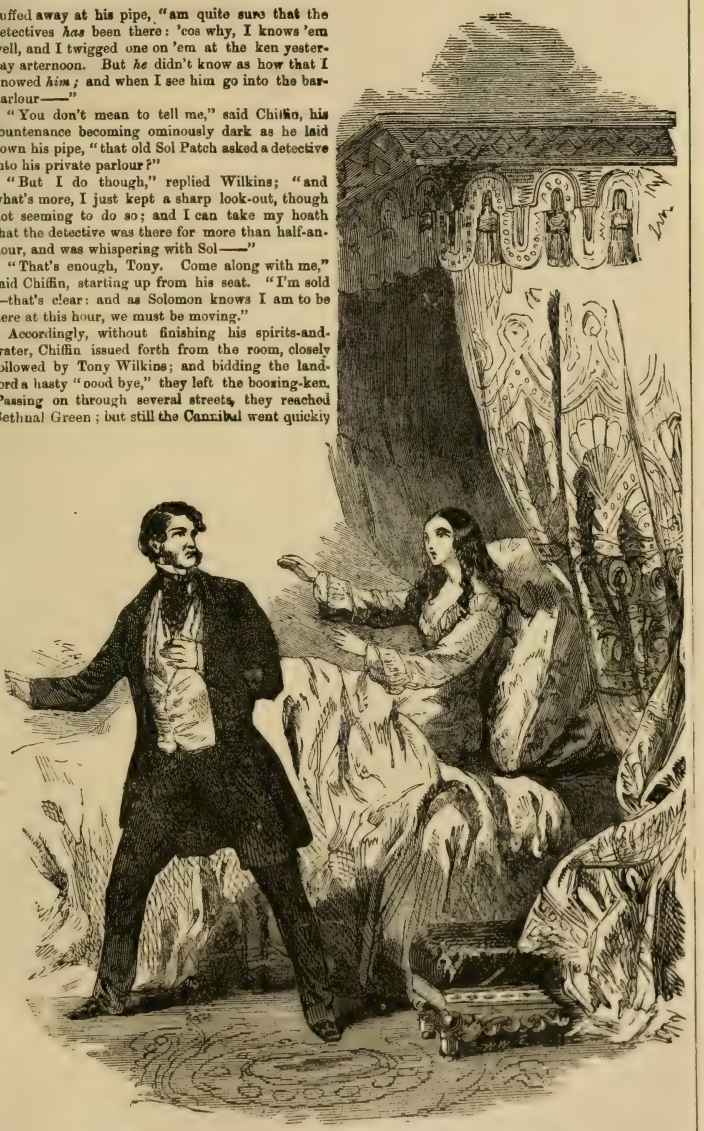
puffed away at his pipe, "am quite sure that the detectives *has* been there: 'cos why, I knows 'em well, and I twigged one on 'em at the ken yesterday arternoon. But *he* didn't know as how that I knowed *him*; and when I see him go into the bar-parlour——"

"You don't mean to tell me," said Chiffin, his countenance becoming ominously dark as he laid down his pipe, "that old Sol Patch asked a detective into his private parlour?"

"But I do though," replied Wilkins; "and what's more, I just kept a sharp look-out, though not seeming to do so; and I can take my hoath that the detective was there for more than half-an-hour, and was whispering with Sol——"

"That's enough, Tony. Come along with me," said Chiffin, starting up from his seat. "I'm sold—that's clear: and as Solomon knows I am to be here at this hour, we must be moving."

Accordingly, without finishing his spirits-and-water, Chiffin issued forth from the room, closely followed by Tony Wilkins; and bidding the landlord a hasty "oood bye," they left the boozing-ken. Passing on through several streets, they reached Bethnal Green; but still the Cannibal went quickly



on, evidently determined to place a considerable distance between himself and the place they had just left. At last he turned into another low public-house, in one of the narrow dirty streets near the old church in the Bethnal Green district; and being known there, as well as at the former boozing-ken, he was speedily accommodated with a private room, where he might discuss matters with Tony Wilkins.

"Now to business," said the Cannibal, when his order for liquor and pipes had been duly attended to. "I know the people are staunch here; and so I needn't be afraid of anything wrong. As I said just now at t'other place it's as clear as daylight that Solomon Patch has nosed upon me. He wouldn't like to do it openly, for fear that some of my pals—you, for instance, amongst them—should do him a mischief in consequence. But depend upon it, he wants to get rid of me; and so he's working in secret. Now I am convinced that the affair about the trap-door was all a planned thing betwixt Madge and old Patch, notwithstanding he did swear black and blue at the time——"

"What the deuce are you talking about?" inquired Tony Wilkins, who for the last few moments was gazing on the Cannibal in unfeigned surprise. "What trap-door? I ain't heerd talk of none."

"No—to be sure—I forgot," observed Chiffin: "but now I will tell you all about it. You must know, Tony, that I had a little business to do—a mere matter of getting rid of a couple of swell coves: so I laid a precious nice plant for them. You know when old Sol had the carpenters and builders in the house, pretending to make some repairs and alterations——"

"Yes: and how deuced particular he was," interjected Tony, "in not letting no one go up-stairs or into that scullery-place, while it was all being done."

"Ah! now you will see the dodge of that," rejoined the Cannibal. "It was me that was secretly telling old Solomon what orders to give about keeping his customers away from those rooms: for I was pretty near the whole time up-stairs or else in the scullery showing the carpenters and bricklayers what they were to do; and the end of the business was that I had as neat a pitfall made as ever you would wish to see in a summer's day. It was a regular picture—quite lovely to look at."

Chiffin was for the moment so lost in admiring contemplation of the ingenious contrivance to which he was alluding, that he forgot his companion Tony was awaiting farther explanations on the subject: but being reminded thereof, he proceeded to describe the whole particulars of the pitfall—which, being already known to the reader, we need not recapitulate here.

"Well," he continued, "I let Madge Somers into the secret——"

"Ah!" interrupted Tony, "I was going to ask you what it was you and Madge had quarrelled about: for I always thought you was very friendly together. In course we had all heerd that you had pretty near done her business for her up at some house near the Regency Park, and that the detectives was arter you in consequence: but none of us knowed the reason why you had fell out with her—and old Sol wouldn't say a word on the subject."

"When I think of it," said the Cannibal, "I dare say that old Sol wanted to get rid of Madge too: so he let you bring me the note—that note, you remember, when you come to me at my lodging up in Camden Town——"

"To be sure," responded Wilkins. "Old Sol gived me half a sovereign——"

"Which he took precious good care to make me pay him back again," observed Chiffin. "Well, that note was to tell me that Madge was going to keep some appointment in the Regent's Park; and it struck me that it must be at the house of one of them swell coves that I was going to pitch down into the well. So I bowled off as fast as I could; —and as savage as a lion, I rushed into the house, and as you know, deuced near did her business for her. I wish I had quite—the infernal hag!"

"Well, but about what you was going to tell me?" observed Tony Wilkins: "summut that Madge had planned with old Solomon——"

"To be sure! I forgot—I hadn't finished that part of the business," said Chiffin. "Well, you must know that I let Madge into the secret that something was to be done with that pit-fall: 'cos why, I wanted a person to touch the spring, and I thought she was to be trusted. But she wasn't. The wretch! instead of letting the two swell coves down, she touched the spring just as I was on the trap-door: and it worked like the drop at Newgate underneath my feet."

"You don't mean to say that Madge played you that trick?" cried Tony Wilkins.

"But I do though," answered the Cannibal; "and in a jiffey I was at the bottom of the well. Down I soused, right under the water—for it was at least six foot deep: but fortunately a thundering big stone lay at the bottom—and getting upon this, I was able to keep my head above water. You can fancy the precious rage I was in: for I knew deuced well that Madge must have done it on purpose, as the bolt would have never given way of its own accord. I saw the old wretch look over with the candle in her hand; and I wished she would tumble in. Wouldn't I have held her fast under the water till she was drowned!"

"I should think so, too," observed Tony. "But how did you get out?"

"Stop a bit, and I'll tell you all about it. I remained as still a mouse, with only just my head above water; and I kept my face turned down a bit, so that those who looked into the well mightn't catch a glimpse of it: for I was very sure that if I made any noise, or if it was seen that I was alive, those two genelmen would have called in the police, and I should have been had off to gaol. I heard Madge talking to them, but couldn't catch a syllable that was said. I was uncommonly afraid that the genelmen would insist on having the place searched, to see whether it was really all over with me or not: but they didn't. After a little while, I saw both Madge and old Solomon looking down through the trap-door: she had a light in her hand, and I could distinguish them as plain as possible as I just threw a quick glance upward. They were talking too: but I couldn't hear what they said. Madge lifted up the trap door, which caught the spring-bolt, and so remained fixed. Then there was a few minutes' silence and darkness for me; and I wondered how the deuce it would all end. Presently Madge and old Solomon came into the scullery-place where the

well is; and once more did she look down over the brink. I kept as still as death; and I heard what they said."

"Did old Solomon say anything to show that it was all done on purpose and he knowed it?" asked Wilkins.

"I can't say that he did," responded Chiffin: "but very little passed between them at all. Madge asked what was the depth of the well, and how much water there was: and then she told Solomon to help her put some of the flag-stones over the opening. By jingo! that was a precious queer moment for me; and I was a deuced great mind to shout out: but I saw I was completely in their power, and thought I had better trust to chance and remain quiet."

"You *must* have felt queer," observed Tony. "It was like burying one alive."

"I believe you," ejaculated Chiffin. "Well, they took and covered the opening with those flag-stones. I was frightened that they might let one of them slip in—and then perhaps it would have been all up with me; for a gentle rap on the head with a paving-stone tumbling down that height, wouldn't have been a trifle to laugh at. But they did their work neat enough—so neat indeed, that I thought I was done for ever. They went out of the place; and there was I, just for the all the world as if it was at the bottom of a vault in a church, buried alive! It was even worse—for I was up to my chin in water; and though it wasn't particularly cold at first, it wasn't very pleasant. I waited about a quarter of an hour, just to see whether Madge or old Sol would come into the scullery again: for I did not like to make a move if there was a chance of being found out—'cause why, I thought that after all they had done, if they should hear a splashing and so find I was alive, they would heap such a lot of things on the top of the well that I might as well try to move a mountain as to dislodge them. But all remained quiet. So I began to feel about the sides of the well, to find if there was any chance of being able to climb up. Precious lucky for me was it that the brick-work had given way in several places; and so I was able to clamber to the very top. Then, keeping as sure a footing as I could—and uncommon hard work it was—I felt the stones overhead: but my first thought was that I should never be able to move them. I tried to push my fingers betwixt them—but it was no use: and then, lo and behold! some of the brick-work gave way, and I tumbled down to the bottom again, hurting myself confoundedly. I scrambled up on the big stone, and was once more chin-deep in the water. I thought to be sure the splash would be heard in the bar: but no one came into the scullery. Then I asked myself what the devil I was to do, and whether I was to stay there—to fall asleep perhaps, and be drowned like a dog—or to be starved to death. You may be sure that I vowed vengeance upon Madge and old Solomon if I should ever get out—of which however there seemed to be uncommon little chance."

"What a precious plight to be in, to be sure!" said Tony Wilkins. "But go on: it's as good as a story-book."

"Well," continued the Cannibal, "as I was down there—up to the chin in water, and beginning to feel my legs getting numbed with the cold—a thought struck me how to move the stones over the mouth of the well. So taking heart, I climbed up to the top again; and clinging with one hand to the brickwork as I had done before, with t'other hand I took out my clasp-knife, and opened the blade with my teeth. I thrust the blade in between two of the stones, and soon worked the handle up atwixt them also. Then I began to have some little hope; and putting my knife back again into my pocket,—for I thought if I did get out, it should be drawn across old Sol's throat afore morning,—I began to work with my fingers. I could now thrust them in betwixt the stones, till at last I got my hand up—and then my wrist: so you see I was widening the opening. I went on working away: but it was a killing job. I had to keep shifting my hands—first clinging by the right and working with the left—then clinging with the left and working with the right, so as to rest them in their turn. Once too, I was so stiff and tired of hanging up in that style, that I had to climb down again and take a stand in the water for ten minutes to rest myself. Then up I went again—and to work once more! And all this time I could hear the shouts of laughter coming from the tap-room; and I wished I was there, with a jolly good glass of lush and a pipe. However, I succeeded in the long run in getting out of that cursed well; and when I had moved the stones far enough to scramble forth, I fell down on the floor of the scullery, quite exhausted. A child might have killed me then: I could not have offered any resistance. I was so tired that I hadn't the slightest inclination to move. A drowsiness came over me—and I gave myself up to it, as one may say: I was dead beat. So I fell fast asleep; and when I woke up again, I was as cold as ice. Only fancy going to sleep like that, with one's clothes on, dripping wet! All was now quiet in the house; and I heard the clock in the bar strike two. Two in the morning!—and it was a little after nine that I had tumbled into the well: so that you can guess how many hours I had been acquainted with cold water. When I tried to get up, my limbs were as stiff as if they were frozen; and I really thought that I must stay there and die. But I fancied to myself what a sin it was to be beat, after all I had gone through and done - and how uncommon pleasant it would be just to draw my clasp-knife across old Sol's throat, to teach him how to play tricks with his pals again. And then I also thought what an uncommon deal of good a tumbler of raw brandy would do me just at that moment—and the bar where it was kept, so close at hand! In short, I managed to raise myself up, and felt for the scullery-door. It was locked—and that was just as I expected. I had to move about a bit, before I could use my limbs properly: but when once the blood began to circulate, I soon forced open the door. Another moment—and I was in the bar.'

"And didn't you help yourself jolly well to the brandy!" exclaimed Tony Wilkins. "I'll be bound you did! I think I should have swigged a whole bottle, if it had been me."

"Well, I did take a pretty decent pull, I can tell you," answered Chiffin; "and it did me a world of good. As luck would have it, there was a little fire left in the bar-parlour: so I lighted a candle which was there, and was able to see what I was about. I found some things to eat—and they also

did me good. Then I took the candle in one hand and my clasp-knife open in the other—and crept up to the bed-room. The door wasn't locked; and I went in. Mrs. Patch was in bed and fast asleep: but Solomon was not there. I didn't exactly know what to do; and while I was thinking, Mother Patch awoke. My eyes! what a start she gave: but I think she was too frightened to cry out. Perhaps she took me for a ghost. Howsomever, I very soon let her know it was no ghost—but honest Chiffin himself: for I told her that her husband had played me a rascally trick, and it was deuced lucky for him I hadn't found him there. She swore black and blue that Solomon was as innocent as a little lamb—that Madge had told him the bolt gave way by accident—and that if he had thought I wasn't drownded in the well, he would have got assistance to pull me out. She begged me not to murder her, and said she knew her husband would do anything he could to make me amends. I asked her where he was; and she said that he was fetched away on very particklar business at about eleven o'clock—that he wouldn't be home all night—for in fact he had gone to Gravesend, where his brother Isaac wanted him. Well, she spoke so fair that I really did begin to think it was possible old Solomon had been humbugged by Madge. I put up my clasp-knife, and told Mrs. Patch that I would see her husband at my own lodging next night—but that neither she or him was on any account to say that I had turned up again, as I meant to let Madge think I was done for—so that she might be thrown off her guard and not get out of the way to escape my vengeance. Then I made Mrs. Patch give me a complete change of rigging from head to foot; and I went down to the bar-parlour to change my things. I can assure you, Tony, that I never felt so comfortable in all my life as when I had dry clothes on."

"I should say so indeed," observed Wilkins. "It's as good as any play I ever saw at a penny gaff. But go on. What did Sol say when you saw him?"

"As soon as I had put on the clean togs, I made the best of my way to my lodging, and went to bed, where I staid for forty-eight hours without ever moving out of it. Old Solomon came at nightfall. He vowed and protested that the account his wife gave me was perfectly true, and that he had firmly believed what Madge told him—that it was all an accident: and he promised to do anything he could to show me how sorry he was. I told him that all I wanted for the present was that if he saw Madge he should keep her in the belief that I was dead and done for; and that he must let me know where I was likely to fall in with her—for she has given up living at her own cottage by the Seven Sisters Road, some time past. He said she was certain sure to be at his house in the evening of the twenty-first of August: but he begged and implored that I wouldn't come and do her a mischief there, as it would only be getting him into trouble. So I told him if he would send me word when she left his house on that night, I would soon be on her track and settle the business. He promised—and he kept his word. That was when you came to me with the note. And now I've no more to tell."

"You went through something on that precious night, Chiffin," said Tony Wilkins.

"Yes—and I felt it for days afterwards—I feel it even now. I must be pretty tough—or else it would have killed me. But I tell you what, Tony,—to go back to what we were saying at t'other boozing-ken,—Sol Patch is selling me to the detectives. There can't be a doubt of it; and if he's false now—why, then he may have been false in the pit-fall affair. Do you think old Sol has got much money in his house?"—and the Cannibal fixed his eyes with a diabolic significancy upon Tony Wilkins as he thus spoke.

"Can't say," responded the younger villain, who fully understood the meaning of that look. "But if you think it worth while——"

"It's worth while for you," said the Cannibal, "if there's any blunt to be got by it; and it's worth while for me even if he had not a penny-piece in the place—cos why, you see, I have now plenty of scores to settle with him. But Solomon we know *is* well off; and though I dare say he don't keep on the premises all he is worth, he must still have something handsome in his cash box. What say you, Tony? You and I have done some business together afore now: shall we do this?"

Wilkins reflected for a few minutes; and at length he said, looking very hard at the Cannibal, "Yes—I will do it along with you."

"Then let's shake hands over it," said Chiffin; and they shook hands accordingly. "I tell you what," continued the elder ruffian, "something has struck me. I should like to know exactly how far old Solomon has gone with the detectives: because, you see, he knows of that little business of mine in the barge——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Tony: "then that was your work—eh? Well, I'm blowed if I didn't always suspect it was."

"To be sure," replied Chiffin, with a grim smile. "I ain't going to have any secrets with you now that we're going to work so comfortable and pleasant together. You see, from a certain inquiry that I got some one to make in the neighbourhood of Deveril's house yesterday, I learn that Madge Somers is certain to recover: and so if I was took up on account of *that*, it wouldn't be a hanging case—only a transportation business. But if for t'other affair——"

"The barge business?" said Wilkins inquiringly.

"Yes: if that was made known—why, then I should be booked—and no mistake," added the Cannibal, as another grim smile appeared upon his diabolical countenance. "Now, if old Solomon is really in communication with the detectives, he may have whispered a word about the barge business; and altogether it would be best to find out exactly how far he has gone towards betraying me. Couldn't you, Tony, manage somehow or another to worm yourself into his confidence? You might pretend that you had a spite against me—or that one of the detectives has been speaking to you, and that you feel rather inclined to tumble into their plans and give me over to their keeping. If you did this—and did it *well*, mind—old Sol would be thrown off his guard: he would tell you what's being done—he would perhaps propose that you should be the chap to give me up to the beaks——"

"I understand," said Wilkins: "and I'll do it if you like."

"Well, let it be so," resumed Chiffin. "And there's another advantage to be gained by your playing this part: you can get old Solomon to let you stay at the *Goat* to-morrow night—you can pretend that you want to talk over matters with him after the place is shut up and all the people are gone—and then, at about one in the morning, you could quietly open the door and let me in. We should then know how to do the rest."

Wilkins, who always suffered himself to be swayed entirely by the Cannibal, consented to these suggestions; and the two ruffians continued the farther discussion of their plans, together with fresh supplies of liquor. They did not separate until a late hour, a thorough understanding being established as to the entire mode of procedure.

CHAPTER CXII.

TONY WILKINS.

It was about six o'clock in the evening of the following day that Tony Wilkins made his appearance at the *Billy Goat;* and passing by the bar without taking the least notice of old Patch or his wife, he strode onward with sullen looks into the tap-room. The dirty lad who served as pot-boy and waiter, followed him in, to receive whatsoever commands he had to issue; and Wilkins, having ordered some liquor and a pipe, told the lad in a savage voice to "make himself scarce," as he wanted to be alone; for there was no one else in the room at the time. Old Patch,—having observed Tony's sullen looks, and hearing from the pot boy in what an ill temper he appeared to be,—thought there was something strange in all this, and determined, if possible, to find out what it was. So, taking a glass of liquor in his hand, he went into the tap-room, sat himself down at the same table with Tony Wilkins, and made some casual remark. Tony answered in an abrupt and half-savage manner—and then appeared to relapse into a train of disagreeable reflections.

"Why, what ails you, Tony?" asked old Solomon. "You seem altogether out of sorts this evening. Is things going wrong—or how?"

"Things is well enough," responded Wilkins: "but I'll be hanged if I'll put up any longer with that feller's brutal humours."

"What feller's? who do you mean?" asked Solomon.

"Who the deuce should I mean, but Chiffin?" replied Tony, still in a half-sullen, half-savage manner. "And by the bye, I don't at all thank you for sending me on a message to him last night. He growled like a bear with a sore head when I told him as how there was never a letter for him; and he went on at me just for all the world as if it was my fault that his letters hadn't come. Then he told me to meet him somewhere again this artern on, as he wanted to speak to me So I went just now: but because I was a trifle late at the place of appintment, he blackguarded me in a way I couldn't stand. So I some off, and left him to his humours."

"Ah!" observed old Solomon, "you are not the only one, Tony, that is afeard of Chiffin the Cannibal. I have been a many years at the *Goat*, and during the time have seen a many rum customers: but hang me if ever I met a feller like Chiffin. One doesn't dare say one's soul is his own where he be."

"You're right enow, Sol," responded Tony. "But I've done with him. I'm blowed if he shall bully me any more. I tell you what it is, Sol—I've stood more at different times from that man than from any other; and now it all seems to have gathered in one great spite, if you understand what I mean ——But I'm a cursed fool to talk this way afore you," cried Tony, suddenly checking himself: "'cause why, you're such a intimate friend of Chiffin's."

"Softly, softly, my young feller," observed old Solomon: then, fixing a peculiar look upon Wilkins, he added, "Not so much of a friend perhaps to Chiffin as you seem to think. Didn't I say a minute back that he *will* be lord and master wheresumever he is? and this don't always suit. Besides, I don't mind telling you, Tony, that I think Chiffin's day is pretty nigh over: he has had a uncommon long run of it—a wonderful run—more than twenty year, to my knowledge."

"Well, if his day is nigh over," observed Wilkins, "the sooner the better, say I—and that's all about it."

"But I dare say this spite of your'n will wear off," resumed Solomon, after a pause: and again he looked very hard at Wilkins, as if to penetrate into his very soul. "Yes—it will wear off; and you'll be as friendly again as ever with Chiffin."

"Never!" ejaculated Tony, striking his clenched fist forcibly upon the table. "Him and me are now two—and I mean we shall keep so. Why, you don't think, Sol—do you—that I am going to be bullied, and baited, and kicked about by that feller? If you think so, you're uncommon mistaken. No: I'd sooner go and give him up——"

But here Tony checked himself once more: indeed he stopped completely short—and then gazed in a sort of consternation upon Solomon Patch, as if fearful that he had said something that might be repeated again and draw down upon his head the terrific vengeance of the Cannibal.

"You needn't look at me like that," observed the old man: "I sha'n't peach agin you. So far from that, I think that perhaps you and I seem to be more of a mind on the matter than you may suppose."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Wilkins, now appearing to eye the old landlord very keenly in his turn.

"I mean this," responded Patch—"that I am as sick and tired of Chiffin as you can be—and what' more, I think that he would be a go. I riddance. I only wish that he'd never set foot in the *Goat* again; and I don't think I should break my heart if he was safe locked up in the Stone Jug."

"Well, since you speak so frank and candid," replied Wilkins, "I don't mind telling you that he *was* deuced near getting locked up just now."

"As how?" asked Solomon: and he drew closer to Tony Wilkins—for their discourse was every instant becoming more significant and confidential.

"Why, after Chiffin had bullied and baited me so just now, 'cause I was a trifle late," answered Wilkins, "I was so precious wild and savage that I was more than half inclined to go and let the beaks know where he might be picked up."

"Ah! you thought of doing that—did you?"

observed Solomon: then, after a few moments' pause, he demanded abruptly, "And why didn't you do it?"

"Well, I don't rightly know," responded Tony. "One doesn't make up one's mind to them kind of things in a hurry: so I come here to think over it."

"You know there's summut to be got by it—don't you?" asked Solomon, now eyeing Wilkins askance.

"About Madge Somers's business, I suppose?" said Tony interrogatively.

"Just so. There's a hundred guineas. How should you like to have fifty, Tony!"

"Uncommon well—and there's no mistake about it."

"And you wouldn't flinch when it came to the pint? you wouldn't think of it? you are sure you wouldn't, Tony?"

"Not I indeed! why should I? I've come to hate Chiffin—and so would you too, if you'd been called all the names he called me just now and last night. Human natur' can't stand it, Sol."

"To be sure not," rejoined the old landlord, inwardly chuckling as he flattered himself he had thus far drawn Wilkins out so very cleverly: "to be sure not! But if you're raly in right down earnest and will give Chiffin up, I'll introduce you to-morrow to somebody that will arrange the whole matter with you:—and then of course it must be an understood thing that you and me is to share the reward—though I'm to keep altogether in the background, and you must never let it out to a soul that I had anythink to do in the business."

"Not I," responded Wilkins. "You know, Sol, you can depend upon what I say. So it's a bargain. But who's this person you are going to introduce me to to-morrow?"

"Who should it be," said the old landlord with a sly look, "but somebody as wants Chiffin?"

"A detective, I suppose?" interjected Wilkins.

"Well, that's about the mark," returned Solomon. "You needn't be afeard to look the genelman in the face: he doesn't want you for nothink."

"And it's only about Madge's business, then, that Chiffin his-self is wanted?" said Wilkins after a pause. "Why, if Madge recovers, it won't perhaps be more than a transportation case——unless you have let out anything about t'other affair——"

"What other affair?" inquired Solomon hurriedly.

"Why, the barge business," answered Wilkins.

"Ah! then you know as how that was Chiffin's affair? And how come you to know it?"

"Why, Chiffin his-self told me: he didn't make no secret of it."

"But *you* must, Tony—*you* must," was Solomon's hasty and anxious rejoinder. "Not a word to the detective on that score—not a syllable: Don't you see, we might get took up as accessories after the fact on account of knowing it and not giving information. That's the law, Tony: so take care of yourself."

"Thank ye for the advice—I shan't neglect it, you may be sure. But what time will this detective genelman be here to-morrow?"

"When and where do you think you could fall in with Chiffin again?" demanded Solomon: "'cause why, it mustn't be at any of his haunts that's knowed to me—I mustn't seem to have anythink to do in it—that's our agreement, you know."

"To be sure—all right enough!" answered Wilkins. "I can see Chiffin any time I like to-morrow."

"Well then, it can be done early:"—and after a few moments' reflection, the landlord added, "The detective shall be here at nine o'clock in the morning: there's no one about then to take any pertickler notice. And I tell you what, Tony—the best thing you could do would be to sleep here to-night. I will give you a bed and a good breakfast in the morning; and all things considered, it would be much better—'cause why, you'll be on the spot quite handy, to see the detective when he comes in the morning—and there won't be no waiting or bother of that sort."

"Well, I don't mind," observed Wilkins: "but I have got an appintment with my young o'oman at nine o'clock——"

"You must put it off, Tony," interrupted Solomon in a peremptory manner: "you must stay here altogether till you've settled things with the detective. You can order as much lush, and bakker, and what not, as you like: I'll stand treat—and a good supper of tripe and inguns into the bargain."

"That's business-like," said Wilkins; "and it's fort'nate I told my young o'oman to meet me just over the canal-bridge at nine o'clock: so I can run out for a minute and stall her off till to-morrow."

"You can do that: but mind, you mustn't be more than five minutes away. You promise?"

"Yes, to be sure—if you wish it."

"Hush! there's chaps a-coming—we won't be seen whispering together."

Thereupon Solomon Patch emptied his glass, and rose to quit the room, just as several of its regular frequenters made their appearance,—their approach having been heralded by some boisterous outburst of merriment in front of the bar. Thither did Solomon return, chuckling inwardly at the arrangement he had effected with Tony Wilkins, whom he purposed to keep as much as possible under his own eye till the morning, for fear lest if he went out he might perchance fall in with the Cannibal, and be deterred from his purpose either by compunctious feelings of his own, or a return to good humour on the part of that individual. But on *his* side, Tony Wilkins was also chuckling inwardly, for reasons which are obvious enough.

At nine o'clock Tony quitted the *Billy Goat*, and having assured himself that he was not followed, hurried away across the bridge, and descended to the towing-path of the canal, where Chiffin was waiting for him. Their conversation was brief and hurried; and when they separated, Tony Wilkins sped back to the boozing-ken, receiving a significant nod of approbation from Solomon Patch as he passed the bar; for he had not been altogether more than ten minutes absent, and the old landlord was well pleased at what he considered to be a proof of deference and good faith on the young ruffian's part. Re-entering the tap-room, Tony continued to smoke and drink at Solomon's expense: and the promised supper was not forgotten. The orgie on the part of the frequenters was kept up as usual until past midnight; and when the

house was cleared of all save the regular inmates and Tony Wilkins, preparations were made for retiring to rest. A little crib of a bed-room on the same floor as Solomon's own, was assigned to Tony; and by one o'clock a complete silence prevailed throughout the dwelling.

Tony did not undress: but he put out his candle in order to avoid creating any suspicion of an evil design. He sat down on the bed—and thus waited for at least three quarters of an hour. Then he took off his shoes; and gently opening the door of his room, listened with suspended breath. Not a sound met his ears: but for full five minutes did he remain listening. Then he began to descend the stairs, very slowly and very carefully,—pausing, too, on every step, for the wood-work made a slight creaking noise. But no one appeared to be disturbed; and he reached the ground-floor. He was now in the open space in front of the bar; and being quite familiar with every feature of the establishment, he had no difficulty in reaching the street-door without stumbling against any object, though utter darkness prevailed. It was easy to draw back the bolts and unfasten the chain: but, as had been foreseen, the door was locked, and the key had been removed—most probably taken up-stairs to the room where the landlord and his wife slept. Drawing forth from his pocket a small crow-bar, or "jemmy," not more than a foot and a half long, and sharp as well as thin at one extremity, Tony Wilkins began to operate on the lock; and this proceeding was conducted so noiselessly and at the same time so skilfully, that in less than five minutes the lock came off in his hand, and no one in the house was disturbed. The door was now opened; and Chiffin the Cannibal entered the place.

The instant the door was closed again, the elder ruffian produced a dark lantern from his pocket; and it was promptly lighted. Then the two villains exchanged rapid looks; and while on the one hand Chiffin assured himself that Wilkins was resolute, the latter perceived an expression of a savage desire for vengeance on the countenance of the other. They spoke not a word: they had nothing to say—their plans were already settled—they had now only to execute them. Chiffin took off his heavy boots; and leading the way, he began the ascent of the narrow staircase, closely followed by his accomplice.

The rooms up-stairs had been restored to their original condition,—that where the trap-door was formed, being once more used as a sleeping chamber for the landlord and his wife. On reaching the threshold of this room, Chiffin passed the lantern to Tony Wilkins, and then cautiously tried the handle of the door: but, as he had expected, it was locked. He immediately drew forth from his pocket a small crow-bar, similar to that which the younger ruffian had already rendered serviceable; and this the Cannibal used with so much promptitude and dexterity, as well as force, that the door was burst open in a moment. Patch and his wife both started up from the sound sleep in which they were wrapped at the time: but almost before a single sound of alarm had issued from their lips, Chiffin threw himself upon them, and his hands were at once forced upon their mouths in such a manner that they could not cry out. The next proceeding followed quick as thought; and it was horrible too—most horrible. For Tony Wilkins with his own crow-bar dealt Patch a terrific blow on the head; and the next instant the same murderous weapon crashed upon the skull of the woman. The Cannibal, now having his hands free, drew forth his ghastly clasp-knife, and made the murderous work still more sure by cutting the throats of the two victims.

All this was done in an incredibly short space of time: it was the work of but a few moments. Yes: a few moments sufficed to hurry two beings into the other world! And it was done so noiselessly too, that when the murderers listened at the chamber-door, they caught no sound to lead them to believe that the pot-boy or the female-servant whom the Patches kept, had been disturbed. As for the spectacle which the bed now presented, it was hideous and ghastly: husband and wife—that old man and that old woman—lay side by side,—their heads beaten in, their throats frightfully gashed, the sheet and coverlid stained with the blood which had spirted forth and was continuing to flow profusely. But little recked the principal assassin for the horror of the sight: while on the other hand the younger one was all in the tremor of fevered excitement—as this was the first blood he had ever seen shed. His face, too, was ghastly pale; and indeed, scarcely was the crime accomplished, when he wished it undone.

"Come, Tony," said Chiffin, speaking in a low whisper, for fear of alarming the servants, "don't stand shivering and shuddering there—but let's look out for the spoil. Here, my lad—take a drop of this."

Tony Wilkins eagerly snatched the brandy-flask which the Cannibal presented to him; and he drank with avidity a portion of its contents. The fiery fluid seemed to circulate like lightning through his veins, giving him the courage which he had all on a sudden lost immediately after the perpetration of the crime. A grim smile expanded itself on Chiffin's countenance, as he saw by the light of the lantern the alteration which was all in a moment effected by the potent alcohol in respect to his companion: and then he took a long draught himself. They now began to search the drawers, the cupboards, and the trunks. The cash-box was speedily discovered: but its contents did not exceed twenty pounds.

"There must be more somewhere," growled Chiffin: and the search was continued.

A few articles of jewellery, of insignificant value, and with which Mrs. Patch had been wont to adorn her person on Sundays and on holidays, were discovered in one of the drawers: but no more money. As for plate, there was none,—no articles of silver being used at the *Billy Goat*. The garments of the murdered victims were next searched: but only a few shillings were found in the pockets. There was Solomon Patch's watch—an old silver one, of the description known as the "turnip" kind; and there was likewise a breast-pin, but of little value. Every nook and corner of the chamber was carefully examined: still no more money, either in gold or bank-notes, appeared to be forthcoming. The Cannibal suggested that the mattrasses should be ripped open—a proposal to which Tony Wilkins at once assented: for the thought that so tremendous a crime had been perpetrated for so poor a profit as

that already in hand, was already goading him to desperation.

"We must remove the stiff'uns off the bed," observed Chiffin: "but take care you don't get the blood on your clothes. It's precious tell-tale, my boy;—and you see I managed with the knife so well that I didn't get a drop."

They lifted the corpses from the bed and deposited them on the floor: they then examined the mattrasses, which they cut open—but without discovering any additional spoil. Finally it became apparent enough that the murdered couple had either no more money in the house, or else that it was so well concealed as to baffle the search of the assassins.

"Come along, Tony," said Chiffin: "it's no use waiting here any longer."

"But there must be more swag than this," replied Wilkins, perfectly aghast: for *he* had become an accomplice in the crime for the sake of booty alone—*he* had no vindictive feeling to appease—or no treacherous intent of betrayal on his own account to frustrate. "Yes—there must be more!"

"But if there isn't, there isn't," replied Chiffin savagely. "Come, take another dose of this:"—and he once more produced the brandy-flask. "We can fill it down stairs again if we choose," he added with a diabolic grin.

Wilkins poured down his throat all the remainder of the contents: but now the fiery fluid failed to revive his spirits. He felt thoroughly miserable.

"Come along," said Chiffin: "it's no use staying here."

They issued forth from the chamber where this horrible crime had been committed, and descended the stairs as noiselessly as they had previously stolen up them. They paused for a few minutes to make a farther search in the till of the bar, and in the cupboards of the bar-parlour: but not another coin did they discover.

"Now, it won't do for us both to be seen going out together," said Chiffin. "One of us must go first. You may, if you like."

Tony Wilkins clutched eagerly at this proposition, inasmuch as not for worlds would he have remained behind in that house where murder had just been done. Chiffin saw how much he was troubled at the scanty proceeds of so enormous a crime; and for an instant he was fearful that such a state of mind was even calculated to superinduce remorse and lead to confession. The thought therefore struck him that he would abandon his share entirely to his accomplice—which he could very well have afforded to do, inasmuch as he possessed a considerable hoard of his own. But Chiffin had lately become greedy after gold; and he could not bring himself to say the word which would deprive him of the comparatively paltry pittance which constituted his portion of the present spoil. He had taken possession of the money and jewels—he had them about him—and he did not like to give all up.

"Well then," he said, "you go out first, Tony—and make straight off towards King's Cross. I'll join you there in about five or ten minutes—and then we will divide the swag."

Wilkins would much sooner have had his share at once before he left the place: but he did not dare express a wish that would have been tantamount to a suspicion: for he stood fearfully in awe of the terrible Cannibal. He therefore stole forth from the scene of murder, and bent his way in the direction of King's Cross.

Chiffin had extinguished the light in his lantern ere the street door was opened to afford egress to Tony Wilkins. He now therefore remained in the dark: for the shutters of the windows were all closed. But no sensation of fear crept upon this dreadful man: on the contrary, he gloated with a savage ferocity over the vengeance he had wreaked. For he had learnt from Tony Wilkins, when they met for a few minutes on the towing-path of the canal, that their suspicions were confirmed in respect to Solomon Patch's contemplated treachery; and with all the fiendishness of his nature, did he rejoice at the murderous work he had done. He remained for nearly ten minutes in the solitude and darkness of the bar ere he ventured to open the street-door: but at length, on issuing forth, he beheld no one through the gloom of the morning-hour—nor did the sounds of any footsteps save his own reach his ears. He made the best of his way towards the canal-bridge: but just as he had reached it, a posse of men suddenly emerged from a house close by—and Chiffin found himself, if not exactly in their midst, at all events so unpleasantly close that if he had taken to his heels their suspicions that he was some evil-doer would at once have led to pursuit.

We must here pause for a few moments to state who these persons were, and explain their presence in Agar Town. The house whence they had so suddenly emerged, had long been suspected of containing an illicit still; and some positive information having been recently received by the authorities,—as well as some specific details as to the quantity of liquor sent forth from the place,—it was resolved to pay a visit thereto. In an earlier chapter of the narrative we said that incursions of this nature were rare in respect to Agar Town: but on the present occasion the conduct of the workers of the illicit still had become so emboldened by long impunity, that it could not be tolerated. Accordingly, a strong body of Excise officers and of policemen in plain clothes, had been appointed for this special service. They had repaired one by one, and from different quarters, to Agar Town—they had met at a given moment close by the house which was the object of their visit—and they had burst in. But to their infinite surprise and discomfiture, they found nothing to justify their inroad. A man and woman—the only occupants of the house—were disturbed from their slumbers: but there was no still—no illicit spirit—no vessels having any appliance to the suspected process. Whether it were that the inmates of the house had been put upon their guard as to the contemplated incursion, and had made their arrangements accordingly, — or whether it were that the house itself contained some secret laboratory so well concealed as to escape the prying eyes and scrutinising research of the officers, — we know not; nor is it necessary for the purposes of our tale to pause and inquire. Certain however it was, that after the most minute examination of the premises, nothing criminatory of the occupants could be discovered; and the discomfitted officers were beating a retreat, —when, on emerging forth, they encountered the Cannibal in the manner already described.

LADY CASTLEMAINE.

Chiffin stopped short, irresolute for a moment how to act: indeed, he was suddenly dismayed by this bursting forth of a posse of persons from the house in question. The gloom of the hour was quite sufficient to save him from recognition, had no artificial light been used: but all in a moment one of the policemen, drawing back the shade of his lantern, flashed the light of his bull's-eye full on the ruffian's countenance.

"'Tis Chiffin!" was the cry instantaneously raised by half-a-dozen voices: staves were drawn—and there was a quick rush towards him.

His club—an invariable companion of the Cannibal's—instantaneously struck down the foremost of the officers: but his way across the bridge was barred—and he had no alternative but to dash along the road, which had a row of houses on one side and the parapet of the canal-wall on the other. The officers were close at his heels; he tore along at a furious pace: it was indeed for life or death. His presence in Agar Town at that precise time would not fail to be connected with the double murder at the boozing-ken, when the crime should be discovered; and if brought home to him, his path to the gibbet would be inevitable. His position was therefore desperate: and desperate was the thought that flashed to his brain. But what was this? In a few moments we will explain it. He might have turned off into any of the diverging streets: but his capture would be certain —for the officers were gaining upon him. He might lead them a dance amidst the mazes of Agar Town: but they could disperse themselves—and he must fall into their hands. He could turn and fight desperately—he had pistols in his pocket—he had a crowbar that would do murderous work, as well as his club: but though by means of all these weapons he might level the foremost of his enemies, he was certain to be overpowered by numbers. All these reflections swept through the man's brain in an instant,—quick as thought alone can travel. Then what was the desperate idea which had suggested itself? We shall now see.

Chiffin had sped furiously on during the space of about two minutes: and, as we have already stated, his pursuers were rapidly gaining upon him. He glanced back: the foremost were not fifteen yards distant. In another two minutes he would be in their hands! All in a moment he sprang upon the parapet—balanced himself there for another instant —and in the next made one tremendous spring forward, disappearing from the view of the officers. They stopped short literally appalled,—for the height was great, and if he fell on the towing-path beneath, he must either be killed on the spot or fearfully maimed. But a tremendous splash in the water far below made them aware that Chiffin had cleared the towing-path and had plunged into the canal. Some of the officers rushed to the parapet and looked over: some sped forward to seek a descent to the towing-path; while others as quickly retraced their way to hurry across the bridge and intercept the Cannibal's flight on the opposite side. The confusion and excitement were immense. Those who remained looking over the parapet, threw the light of their bull's-eyes down into the cutting through which the canal ran: but the rays reached not far enough to find reflection on the surface of the water—nor could the glances of the men penetrate through the depth of gloom into which they looked down. Gurgling and splashing noises were heard, evidently produced by the struggling of the Cannibal in the water: but in about a minute they ceased altogether.

It was more than two or three minutes before any of the officers succeeded in getting down upon the towing-paths on either side; and then it was too late. Nothing could be heard or seen of the Cannibal. A careful inspection of the bank, however, on the opposite side of the canal to that where he had plunged in, showed where he must have scrambled out, as that particular spot was all wet. In the same manner his progress was traced a little way along the path; and in this direction did the officers accordingly speed—but without success: he had fully accomplished his escape.

Three or four hours later, when the potboy and servant-woman at the boozing-ken rose to enter upon the duties of the day, they made the fearful discovery of the horrible murder which had been perpetrated. An alarm was quickly raised—the neighbourhood was aroused—the utmost excitement prevailed. The servants knew that Tony Wilkins had been asked to remain for the night at the house: his bed had not been slept in—he had disappeared—and there was consequently no doubt as to his guilt either as the sole perpetrator of the deed or as an accomplice. The police repaired in due course to the scene of the horrible tragedy; and it now became known that Chiffin was encountered and chased in the middle of the past night. It was not therefore difficult to imagine that he was one of the authors of the crime; and measures were accordingly taken with promptitude for the apprehension of the Cannibal and of Tony Wilkins.

CHAPTER CXIII.

THE TWO MURDERERS.

In the meantime Tony Wilkins had repaired to King's Cross, according to the directions of the elder ruffian. He lounged and loitered about for ten minutes, and then began to think it strange that Chiffin did not come. Another ten minutes elapsed: but still the Cannibal made not his appearance. Suspicions had been growing and strengthening in the mind of Tony Wilkins during these last ten minutes; and he came to the conclusion that the Cannibal meant to self-appropriate all the produce of the crime. Wherefore had he not made the division previous to their separation? and wherefore did he not keep his appointment now? Wilkins was almost distracted at the thought of having committed so hideous a deed and placing his neck in peril of a halter, without reaping one farthing's benefit. He had scarcely any money about his person; and it was absolutely necessary he should get away from London as soon as possible. What was he to do? The idea occurred to him that he had better proceed at once to that boozing-ken in Bethnal Green where he knew that Chiffin had purposed to take up his temporary quarters, he having left his lodging in Camden Town immediately after the attempted assassination of Madge Somers. For Wilkins thought that if anything had

transpired to prevent the Cannibal from joining him at King's Cross, and if he really meant to act fairly in dividing the booty, he would proceed to that public-house in Bethnal Green in the expectation of being joined there by his accomplice.

After a walk of nearly an hour and a half Wilkins reached the boozing-ken. It was now nearly four o'clock in the morning: the place was shut up—and Tony scarcely liked to disturb the inmates. So he walked about in the neighbourhood for another hour, taking good care to elude the notice of the policemen, who might question or watch him. His mind all this time was in a dreadfully disturbed state: he was filled with remorse for what he had done, because he had as yet reaped no benefit to create a feeling of reckless joy which might absorb that sentiment of compunction. He was harassed too with his suspicions of the Cannibal's perfidy.

At length he returned to the boozing-ken, and now ventured to knock at the door. In a few minutes it was opened by an ill-looking fellow who acted as potman, and who seemed savagely sullen at having been disturbed from his slumber. He knew Wilkins as a friend of Chiffin's; and as Chiffin was intimate with the landlord of the place, and also a good customer there, the potman did not dare openly to offend anybody connected with him. He therefore answered Tony's queries. The Cannibal was not in the house—he had not slept there that night—he had left at about eleven o'clock—and had not returned since: but a chamber was kept for his accommodation according to his order.

Tony Wilkins was embarrassed how to act. He knew that suspicion of the murder, when discovered, would fall upon himself; and he was therefore most anxious to get out of London: but if he fled at once, it would be throwing away his last chance of meeting the Cannibal and receiving his share of the spoil, supposing that his accomplice really meant to deal fairly by him. The potman seeing that he hesitated and that his looks were strangely wild and troubled, asked if anything was the matter?

"I must see Chiffin—and so I'll wait for him," replied Tony. "We have missed each other, and I hav'n't been in bed all night."

"Well it's no use keeping me standing at the door," said the potman sullenly; "and if a blue-bottle happens to come into the street he'll think there's summut queer going on: so you'd better come in; and if you're tired, what's to perwent you from going up and having a stretch on the bed in Chiffin's room?"

"So I will," answered Tony. "And mind, if anybody comes to inquire arter me, I ain't wisible not to no one, except Chiffin his-self."

"All right," growled the potman, as he closed the front-door of the boozing-ken again. "I s'pose you and the Cannibal has been doing a bit of business together?"

"Yes—but nothink pertickler," responded Tony quickly and curtly. "Which is the way?"

"Come along," was the answer given by the man: and he forthwith conducted Wilkins up into an attic, where he left him.

Tony was at first inclined to throw himself down on the bed to rest: for he was thoroughly wearied and exhausted, as much by the excitement of his mind as by the many hours he had been wandering about. But he felt so uneasy and troubled that he could not lie down. He knew the domestics at the *Billy Goat* were early risers, and that by this time the murder must be discovered: every moment was therefore precious—and he ought already to be many miles away from London. It was no use for him to wait there unless confident that the Cannibal would make his appearance. But how could he know this? As he asked himself the question, the thought struck him that if Chiffin had left anything at this boozing-ken, it might be regarded as a proof that he really meant to return. So Tony began looking about the room. There was a cupboard, which was locked; and this he had a great mind to break open.

"It wouldn't be fastened," he thought to himself, "if it hadn't summut in it worth taking; and if so, I may as well help myself, no matter whether the contents is Chiffin's or belongs to the people of the house. I must be off soon; and I can't go with only a few shillings in my pocket."

Without any farther hesitation, Tony Wilkins drew forth his little crowbar and began to operate on the cupboard-door. In a very few moments it was opened; and he perceived a pair of pistols, two or three shirts, and a bunch of skeleton-keys, which he knew belonged to the Cannibal. He wondered that Chiffin should have taken the precaution to lock up these things of such trifling value; and he instituted a more rigorous search in the cupboard. There was a heavy pair of boots lying at the bottom, and which he likewise knew to be Chiffin's. He took up one of them to see whether they were in a better condition than his own—in which case he would self-appropriate them—when he felt something inside. He drew it out: it was a brown paper parcel, tied round with string, and likewise secured with sealing-wax. The words, "*Powder and bullets*," were scrawled on the wrapper in Chiffin's own hand. Tony Wilkins proceeded to open the parcel,—when, to his mingled amazement and joy, he discovered that it contained an immense quantity of bank-notes, with perhaps about a hundred pounds in gold. The coins were so rolled up into different packets as to make the parcel feel, ere it was opened, as if it really did contain a quantity of pistol-bullets. All the murderer's remorse vanished in a moment: he had suddenly lightened upon a treasure! A hasty computation showed him that the booty amounted to at least six or seven hundred pounds; and he was almost wild with delight.

Securing the treasure about his person, and likewise self appropriating the pair of pistols, Tony Wilkins descended from the chamber as gently as possible, and slipped out of the house, unnoticed by the potman, who was taking another nap on the mattrass where he slept in the tap-room. But just as he emerged into the narrow street, or alley, he beheld Chiffin hurrying towards the place.

"I thought I should find you here," said the Cannibal, who seemed in a most wretched plight,—haggard and exhausted—his clothes soiled with mud and bearing the indications of a recent drenching—his whole appearance, indeed, most suspiciously strange. "Come in," he added gruffly: "we can't stand speaking in the street:—and he knocked peremptorily at the door, which Wilkins had closed behind him.

In a few moments the summons was answered by the potman; but at the very instant that Chiffin

crossed the threshold, Tony Wilkins rushed away—and turning the corner of the street, was at once out of sight.

"What the deuce does it mean?" exclaimed the Cannibal, sweeping his startled looks up and down the narrow alley in which the boozing-ken was situated: for he naturally thought that his accomplice had suddenly been terrified by the appearance of police-constables.

"And how come he out of the house?" said the potman. "I never heerd him go down stairs?"

"What do you mean? where has he been?" demanded the Cannibal, turning round with such fierce abruptness upon the potman, that the latter started back in terror.

"Been? Why he come to wait for you——"

"But where has he been?" vociferated Chiffin, furious with mingled rage and apprehension.

"Been? Why, up in your room——"

"Perdition!" thundered forth the Cannibal; and felling the potman with one tremendous blow of his fist, he sprang up the stairs like a maniac.

The master of the boozing-ken, startled from his sleep at that tremendous rush of heavy steps up the staircase, issued forth from his room just as Chiffin had sprung past the door to gain the higher storey. And now, what cries of rage and bitter imprecations reached the ears of the astounded landlord, who dared not ascend to see what was the matter. But in a few moments Chiffin came thundering and storming down again; and then his loss was revealed, amidst a torrent of the most shocking oaths and diabolical threats. The landlord besought him to be tranquil, or his vociferations would alarm the neighbours: but it was some minutes before the Cannibal could recover the slightest degree of calm. Then he hastily threw off his own soiled and still damp garments, and put on a suit with which the landlord furnished him. This being done, he rushed away from the place, resolved to scour the whole neighbourhood in search of Tony Wilkins, even though at the risk of being recognized and captured by any policemen whom he might meet.

He had not however gone far, before he was struck by a sense of the imprudence of his conduct, as well as by the thought that Wilkins, having at least twenty minutes' start of him, was not likely to be overtaken in that maze of streets, lanes, and alleys. He stopped short, uncertain what course to pursue. Should he go back to the boozing-ken? Scarcely had he asked himself this question, when he recollected that he had left the produce of the past night's crime in the clothes he had put off: for such was his hurry that he had omitted to take the money and the jewels from the pockets thereof. He now cursed his own oversight as bitterly as he had ere now vented his imprecations against Tony Wilkins. He was penniless. He had not even his burglarious implements about him: the very tools that constituted his "stock-in-trade" were wanting. The morning, too, was advancing—the people were getting up and opening their shutters—it was now dangerous for him to be abroad. There was no alternative but to go back to the boozing-ken.

On reaching the alley where it was situated, he peeped cautiously round the corner; and the first object that met his view, was a policeman standing at the door of the public-house. The constable might only be waiting for a morning dram; or he might have a more important object in view. There might be other policemen, too, inside the premises. The murder in Agar Town might long ere this have been discovered—suspicion, after the adventure of the canal, would naturally fasten itself upon him—this public-house might be known to be one of his haunts—and hence the presence of the police. All these reflections swept like a hurricane through the mind of the Cannibal; and he turned abruptly away. The condition of that man's mind was now horrible in the extreme: it was a perfect hell of all the worst and deadliest passions that can possibly find a resting-place in the human breast. But the dominant one was a diabolic thirst for vengeance against Tony Wilkins.

He pursued his way through the narrowest and obscurest streets, in the direction of the eastern outskirt of the Bethnal Green district. The inhabitants of that poor and wretched quarter were now all entering upon the occupations and the toils of the new-born day. The milkman was making his round, dispensing "hapo'rths" of his well-watered commodity at every door. Beggars were seen issuing forth from the dens where they had slept,—walking firmly and looking happily enough, till they entered upon the verge of superior neighbourhoods, when they gradually assumed a shuffling, shambling gait and the most lugubrious expression of countenance in order to pursue their calling. From some open windows the sounds of the weaver's shuttle might be heard; and at others, poor squalid-looking women were seen hanging out patched and ragged articles of clothing to dry. Mechanics and labourers were proceeding to the places where they worked, while others were going to seek for employment. Hideous objects, male and female, were creeping along to the public-house to take their morning dram: street-sweepers, with shouldered brooms, were on their way to the crossings that they claimed as little freeholds of their own in better neighbourhoods. The barber's shop was filled with customers; and bristly beards were disappearing before the keen edge of the razor. Costermongers, with their baskets and trucks, were setting out on the day's trading ventures, with as much speculative pre-occupation as if they were merchants proceeding to the City to deal with hundreds of thousands of pounds sterling. Here might be seen a little child of scarcely five years old staggering under the weight of a quartern loaf just fetched from the baker's: another returning from the chandler's at the corner, with the half-ounce of tea, the quarter of a pound of sugar, and the diminutive morsel of butter for the breakfast. Other children had already commenced the day's usual routine of playing in the gutter, and picking up such garbage as might serve to compensate for the scantiness of the meal whereof they had partaken in-doors.

The Cannibal pursued his way; and in a short time he reached Hackney Marshes. He wandered on, though sinking with fatigue and half-famished with hunger. He had no settled plan: he knew not what course to adopt. Far into the fields he went: he slaked his thirst at a brook—and at length threw himself under a hedge, where he fell into a sound sleep. When he awoke the sun's rays were pouring down, hot and almost scorching, upon his face; and he knew it must be nearly mid-day. He had therefore slept several hours. He rose up and

walked still farther into the country. Again he slaked his thirst at a rivulet: but his hunger was now ravenous. He beheld a cottage at a distance: and thither he bent his steps. The door stood open: a labourer and his wife, with three or four children, were seated at a table, partaking of their frugal repast. Chiffin approached the threshold, and asked for a piece of bread, saying that he was in great distress. He had on a decent suit of clothes, supplied by the landlord of the boozing-ken; and the first thought of the man and his wife was that he was some broken-down tradesman. They were therefore about to invite him to enter and partake of their meal: but when they looked a second time at his villanous hang-dog countenance, they felt convinced that he was an evil character; and the peasant, getting up from table, closed the door abruptly. Chiffin gave vent to a savage imprecation, and dragged himself away.

At a distance from that cottage he sat down again to reflect upon his position and the course he should pursue. That suspicion would fall upon himself in respect to the double murder in Agar Town, he had no doubt; and that there would be an active search for him, he was equally confident. So far as his apparel went, he was to a certain degree disguised by the plain but respectable suit he had on: but how could he prevent his countenance from betraying him? This was the question. Even if he had his whiskers shaved off and his hair cropped close, his features would still remain too remarkable not to identify him. Therefore, to re-enter London was under any circumstances impossible. As for writing to the landlord of the boozing-ken in Spitalfields, to ask that he would remit his money to any stated place,—this would be absurd: for that individual, in the supposition that Chiffin was by no means likely to return to his house—or that if he did, he would be completely in his power—was sure to self-appropriate whatsoever was found in the pockets of the garments left behind. Then what was he to do? A thought struck him. What if he were to travel into Lincolnshire and pay a visit to Saxondale Castle? If her ladyship were still there, well and good—she would supply him with funds: but if not, he could hide himself in the western wing of the building—the larder of the castle, stealthily visited by night, would supply him with food—and he might thus lead a comfortable life for some time, until he found the means and opportunity for getting out of England.

The Cannibal's resolve was accordingly taken; and he composed himself to sleep again under a hedge, so that he should be sufficiently refreshed to journey throughout the ensuing night. It was sunset when he resumed his walk: but he felt faint for want of food. Food he must have, by some means or another. Bending his steps in a northern direction, he entered on the high road with a determination of stopping the first solitary traveller he might chance to encounter, provided the appearance of the individual should promise a booty worth the risk. He walked slowly along—for he was weak and well nigh exhausted, notwithstanding his slumbers of the day: his hunger was no longer ravenous—it had subsided into faintness. The twilight had passed: but it was a beautiful clear night, in the month of September. Presently he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching from behind at a brisk trot. He had in his hand a good stout cudgel with which he had provided himself; and he grasped it in readiness to make an attack. The horseman soon overtook him; and the glance which Chiffin threw over his shoulder at the individual, decided him in a moment. Desperation and excitement nerved him with strength: as for courage, he naturally possessed it. The traveller had the appearance of a substantial farmer, and was a short, stout, strong-built man, somewhere about forty years of age. Chiffin sprang forward, his club in one hand, the other stretched out to seize the bridle of the horse: but the animal, frightened at the suddenness of the movement, swerved aside—and the next instant its rider rolled in the dust. It is more than probable that he would have been stunned by the fall: but the Cannibal, to make sure, dealt him a blow on the head which effectually deprived him of his senses, though not of life. Chiffin lost not an instant in turning out the contents of his pockets, which he found to consist of between two and three pounds in money, some papers, and a silver watch. Of all these things the Cannibal took possession; and for a few moments he deliberated whether he should self-appropriate the horse likewise: but he feared that it might lead to his detection—and he accordingly hastened away from the scene of his villanous exploit.

Speeding across the fields, he ran till he was quite exhausted, and was compelled to rest for a time. Then he continued his journey again—and soon reached a village, where he procured refreshments. Here however he made but a brief halt: for in the tap-room of the public-house where he partook of his meal, the conversation turned upon the dreadful murder which had been discovered that morning in a part of London called Agar Town. The names of Chiffin and Tony Wilkins were freely mentioned, and in rather an unpleasant way too for the listener. It even struck him that he was surveyed in a somewhat scrutinizing manner by those present: and thus he was by no means sorry when, on quitting the public-house, he breathed the open air again.

CHAPTER CXIV.

MRS. BROUGHTON AND THE COUNTESS.

RETURN we once more to the palatial mansion of the Earl of Castlemaine at Kensington. It was the fourth day after the scene when the Countess fainted in her attempt to write a letter to her husband; and during this interval she had remained unconscious of all that was passing around her. When she recovered her intellectual faculties, she began to question Mrs. Broughton as to how long this relapse had lasted—whether the Earl had visited her as was his wont—and whether anything of importance had taken place? In reply to these queries she was informed that she had been three whole days in a dangerous condition again—that the Earl himself, pleading inquisposition, had kept his own chamber—but that he had regularly sent to make inquiries relative to her ladyship's health. Mrs. Broughton added that nothing of importance had occurred,—thereby meaning that there had been no fresh intrusions on the part of the nocturnal visitor to the suite of chambers.

The Countess was much affected on hearing that her husband was unwell: but it soon struck her that this indisposition on his part was merely a pretence in order to avoid the necessity of visiting her own sick-room; and the tears trickled down her cheeks at the thought. After a few minutes' pause she once more expressed a wish to write to her husband: but Mrs. Broughton positively refused to give her the writing-desk—observing that she had incurred a severe rebuke from Dr. Ferney for having done so on the previous occasion.

It was about mid-day when this discourse took place between the Countess of Castlemaine and Mrs. Broughton. Her ladyship inquired the hour; and on being informed, she said, after a few minutes' reflection, "I can endure this state of mind no longer! Earnestly and strenuously would I have avoided the intervention of a third party: but it has now become necessary. If I am not permitted to write, I must speak——It is killing me to endure all this! But of whom should I make a confidant if not of you? whose assistance should I invoke if not your's, my good and faithful Broughton?"

"I beseech your ladyship to compose yourself," said the kind-hearted dependant. "There are more ways of exciting the feelings than by endeavouring to write a letter; and if you experience another relapse, it may prove fatal."

"I will compose myself for a few hours, Broughton," responded the Countess. "But promise me that if this evening—let us say between nine and ten o'clock—you find me sufficiently tranquillized, sufficiently strong also to endure whatsoever little fatigue may be attendant on unbosoming my soul to you,—you will listen—you will permit me to speak—and you will promise to befriend me?"

"Heaven knows, dear lady," responded the woman, with earnest sincerity, "if I could really befriend you, I should be only too happy. But, alas! ——"

"You fear," said the Countess, perceiving that Mrs. Broughton suddenly stopped short, "that mine is a case beyond the reach of friendly aid, and that I have been guilty of errors which naught can efface? You shall see!"—and most singular was the expression which settled upon the pale countenance of Lady Castlemaine—that same expression which had before so much bewildered the worthy Mrs. Broughton, and had set her reflecting whether it were possible, in the face of all circumstances, that the Countess could be innocent?

"Compose yourself, dear lady," she said: "and this evening, if you will, you shall command my services."

"You promise me?—and your promise has already tended to cheer my spirits. My mind is indeed more tranquil now. I feel as if I could enjoy a few hours of peaceful slumber."

"Oh, do!" cried Mrs. Broughton; "and you will awake refreshed."

The Countess of Castlemaine said not another word—but settled herself to sleep; and in a little while she was wrapped in slumber. Soon afterwards one of the younger damsels entered the sick-chamber with an intimation that the Earl had left his own apartment, and had descended to the drawing-room, where he desired Mrs. Broughton's immediate presence. She accordingly proceeded to obey the summons; and on entering the drawing-room, was at once struck by the Earl's altered appearance. He did indeed seem as if he had been very ill: his countenance was haggard and careworn—his eyes, so dark in hue and so bright in lustre, now appeared to burn with the superadded glow of fever. Mrs. Broughton had not seen him for three whole days; and it was therefore no wonder that his altered aspect should strike her so powerfully.

"Dr. Ferney, who was here just now," began the Earl, so soon as she stood in his presence, "tells me that her ladyship has regained her consciousness. Is it so?"

"It is, my lord, I am happy to say," replied Mrs. Broughton.

"And you have been conversing together, no doubt?" continued the nobleman. "I have not forgotten that on the last occasion when I spoke to you privately, you manifested a distaste—a very delicate and praiseworthy one, no doubt—against repeating what occurred between your mistress and yourself. But I hope that you intend to be a little less scrupulous now——Stop! don't interrupt me—I will tell you wherefore I make the remark. I had not seen Dr. Ferney for several days until this morning. He spoke of her ladyship's relapse and its cause: he mentioned something about her desire to pen a letter to me, and that it was while attempting to do so her strength failed her. Was this the case?"

"It was so, my lord," replied Mrs. Broughton, who certainly saw no harm in making this statement. "But at the same time I must request——"

"I know what you would request," interrupted the Earl: "that the interrogatory should cease here?—but it cannot! You must tell me what your mistress purposed to write to me: for I am certain that you know."

"My lord, as I am a living woman and have a soul to be saved," replied Mrs. Broughton, "I am unable to answer that question. Her ladyship did *not* tell me what she purposed to write."

"But will you pretend," he continued, almost sternly, "that you are not in her confidence? Mrs. Broughton, an accident made you acquainted with the circumstance of my dishonour. You might perhaps have suspected it before—you discovered it for a certainty *then!* Will you have me believe that you did not soon afterwards inform her ladyship of what had taken place?"

"No, my lord—I should scorn to do so," she exclaimed, indignantly; "and I should have been likewise sorry indeed to let her understand that you thought so ill of me as to expect that I would repeat conversations and give way to gossip or tittle-tattle. No, my lord—I would not do so!" and she was turning to quit the room.

"But one word, Mrs. Broughton—one word, I beseech you!" exclaimed the Earl, now totally unable to control or conceal the excitement which had seized upon him. "I am about to ask you something to which you *may* give me an answer. The servants——do they speak together?——you know what I mean—do not force me to put into words the odious, horrible thoughts which are uppermost in my mind."

"I believe, my lord," was Mrs. Broughton's guarded response, "that there is not a household in all London where the domestics generally are so

devoted to their master and mistress—or would be more grieved to——"

"This is no answer!" interrupted the Earl fiercely, as he sprang up from his seat. "Do they—do they *suspect* what you *know?*"—and his eyes appeared to burn like living coals as he fixed them upon Mrs. Broughton.

"Since your lordship requires me to be explicit," she rejoined, "I am bound to say that it would be impossible for the servants to avoid certain vague suspicions: but while they suspect, they wonder also, and are bewildered."

"Then *they*, Mrs. Broughton—and *you*," continued the Earl, "have never seen anything to justify those suspicions?"

"My lord, I will be questioned no more," she interrupted promptly and firmly; for though she might have said that the servants had never seen aught to justify their suspicions, she could not make a similar averment in respect to herself after the mysterious intrusions in the suite of chambers and the letter which she had picked up; while, on the other hand, she scorned to tell an untruth in respect to the matter.

"No, you cannot depart yet!" exclaimed the Earl, springing after her as she turned abruptly to quit the room; and clutching her by the arm, he held it as if his grasp were of iron. "You shall speak—you shall tell me all I seek to know," he continued in a thick hoarse voice. "I must learn the extent to which I am dishonoured—I must ascertain whether it be worth my while to keep the hideous secret any longer, or whether I shall expose it to the world at once."

"No, my lord—for heaven's sake do nothing rashly!" cried Mrs. Broughton, now painfully affrighted. "It would be the death of her ladyship!"

"Her death!" echoed the Earl bitterly, as he with strange abruptness abandoned his hold on Mrs Broughton's arm—and even tossed it away from him as if in disdainful indignation at the sort of appeal she had made to his feelings on Lady Castlemaine's behalf. "Her death!—and what matter? Wherefore should she live? To haunt me like a spectre—the personified hideousness of my dishonour—supposing that we continue to dwell beneath the same roof and if I keep the secret from the world?—or else to live, openly branded—publicly disgraced—thrust out from the home which she has made miserable and degraded? Were she wise, and if she had courage as well as shame, she would fly from this world—she would abandon it, even though she laid hands upon herself! Ah, and she would appeal to me for mercy perhaps? *That* I have already shown her—too much, too much! But for forgiveness? No—never, never! She stretched out her arms to me—she adjured me by my name—and I fled from her presence when she awoke, as I would from a reptile that was uncoiling itself! And she would write to me?——Yes, let her write—for perhaps she would confess who was the author of her shame and of my dishonour: and *that* is a secret I long to learn! Oh, why is she so beautiful?—so beautiful and yet so false! the hypocrisy of a serpent in the form of an angel! My God, why is she so lovely——why?"

The Earl of Castlemaine had walked to and fro in the apartment with agitated steps while thus speaking: for he was in a state of terrible excitement. Mrs. Broughton had remained rivetted to the spot,—her presence of mind and her fortitude abandoning her: for she feared lest the nobleman should go mad, and in his ravings in the presence of others give forth revelations that never could be recalled. She was affected too by the wild and mournful accents in which the last sentence of his speech was delivered. She had never seen him in such a mood before—unless it were when entering the chamber unperceived, she had caught the words in which he had apostrophized his sleeping wife. But now there was such a depth of feeling in what he had just said, that she pitied him from the very bottom of her soul. Nor could she help remembering how great was the forbearance he had shown from the very first moment that he discovered his wife's condition on the memorable night of the Duke of Harcourt's ball; and she felt that there must be much generosity and much magnanimity in the soul of this man, beneath that proud and inscrutable exterior! Indeed, she was now struck by the conviction that it was not altogether to save his own name from dishonour that he had shown so much forbearance—but that it must at least in some degree be connected with a once powerful affection entertained for the guilty Priscilla.

Suddenly stopping short in his agitated walk, the Earl of Castlemaine waved his hand for Mrs. Broughton to retire; and she quitted the room accordingly,—her mind filled with melancholy reflections on all that had taken place—but yet not without a faint ray of hope stealing through, to the effect that the revelation she was to hear from the lips of her mistress might in some sense, more or less, give a different complexion to the affair. Yet again and again did she ask herself how in the presence of all damnatory circumstances, Lady Castlemaine could possibly be innocent?

Mrs. Broughton had no undue share of curiosity, as the reader has already seen: but she certainly awaited with much anxious suspense the hour at which the confidential interview with her mistress was to take place. But not to keep the reader unnecessarily delayed, let us suppose that nine o'clock had come—that Lady Castlemaine felt so much invigorated and refreshed that Mrs. Broughton did not deem it imprudent to allow her to converse at length—that they were alone together in the sick-room, with the wax-lights burning, and the curtains carefully closed over the windows. Mrs. Broughton was seated by the side of the couch; and as she bent her looks upon her mistress, she observed an air of mingled decision and confidence on her features, which made the heart of the worthy woman bound with the hope that it might still be possible to clear up all incriminating circumstances. Her ladyship, without raising her head from the pillow, turned her countenance towards Mrs. Broughton, and commenced her narrative in the following terms:—

"I must go back to those times when I was a young creature of between fifteen and sixteen, dwelling with an uncle and aunt: for, as you are already aware, my parents died when I was in my infancy. I had no brothers nor sisters: the family title had become extinct at my father's death; and the estate was sold to satisfy the demands of the creditors. I was portionless, and dependent upon that uncle and aunt. But they supplied, as much

as relatives can, the place of the parents I had lost: they were all kindness to me; and as they had no children of their own, I was to them as a daughter. They themselves were not rich, though in comfortable circumstances: but the chief source of their income was a Government pension conferred on account of diplomatic services, and which would of course die with its recipient. My parents had perished too early for me to deplore their loss as deeply as I should otherwise have done had I known them better; and the goodness of my kind relations prevented me from experiencing the intense severity of such a loss. Thus I was happy, —as happy as a gay and artless girl of between fifteen and sixteen might well be, who knew nothing of the world and of its cares. I had not been introduced into society: or, in fashionable parlance, I had not as yet 'come out,' when I first formed the acquaintance of Lord Castlemaine. He was then about twenty-eight years of age. I need not tell you that he was handsome, because he is handsome now—and you also knew him *then*—or at least, shortly afterwards, at the time of our marriage. I was then staying with my relatives in the country: his lordship was on a visit to a nobleman who dwelt in the neighbourhood: he had some years previously, when he himself was a youth, formed the acquaintance of my uncle—and it was now renewed. Through courtesy he was first invited to the house: the love that he conceived for me led him to repeat his visits. My heart was engaged to him before I comprehended what love was, or wherefore I felt so happy in his presence and pondered so much in solitude on all that he had said when we were together. Thus some months passed away. He lingered in that neighbourhood: he became a daily visitor at the house. At length, when I was sixteen, my aunt questioned me as to the feeling I entertained towards Lord Castlemaine. The question, though delicately and guardedly put, was in itself a revelation: the truth, hitherto utterly unsuspected, flashed upon my comprehension. I understood it all —I loved Lord Castlemaine! Blushing and weeping, I threw myself in the arms of my aunt, with the vague idea that I was guilty of some crime in thus having unconsciously learnt to love. She embraced me tenderly, and breathed in my ears the almost overpowering assurance that his lordship loved me likewise. She went on to observe that on account of my tender age, he had spoken in the first instance to herself; but that if—as he had ventured to hope—his affections were reciprocated, he would plead his suit in person. The Earl thus became my intended husband: I was affianced to him: and although my relatives would have urged the postponement of our union for at least a year, his lordship's persuasion over-ruled their wishes, and it was agreed that in four months I should accompany him to the altar."

The Countess paused, and seemed to be somewhat faint. Mrs. Broughton entreated her not to continue if she felt unequal to the task: but her ladyship assured the worthy woman that she had physical strength and mental fortitude adequate for the occasion, and would prefer going on. She accordingly resumed in the following manner:—

"It is particularly of those four months which elapsed from the date of our engagement to that of our marriage, that I have next to speak. The Earl left the mansion of his noble friend in the neighbourhood, and took up his quarters at a residence near our own, so that he might be with me as much as possible. Words have no power to convey the extent of his love. I did not then comprehend it all myself: I have comprehended it since. But at the time I was too young, too inexperienced, too ignorant of the human heart and its passions, to understand the depth, the intensity, and the power of that love of his. On my side I loved fondly and devotedly—but yet with a certain serenity, which though in itself delicious, displayed itself not in sudden gushes of feeling. When the heart's love is full of confidence—when there appears no possibility that any circumstance can arise to mar its progress or frustrate its hopes—and when it is entertained by one who knows too little of the world to dream of accidents, casualties, and disasters, —the sentiment naturally glides as serenely as the unruffled streamlet. But it was altogether different with Stephen—Lord Castlemaine, I mean. *His* love appeared to be a source of pain as well as of pleasure to him: it racked him with doubts while it filled him with joy: it made him mistrustful of the very happiness of which it was the source. He regarded it as a dream which the slightest incident would dissipate—a bright vision too beautiful to last. It was a rose with thorns. Under its influence his soul appeared to be an Æolian harp, which even to the warmest and most fragrant zephyr sends forth plaintive and wailing sounds as well as others melodiously cheerful. How often and often was he wont to ask me if I were confident that I loved him—if I had examined well my own heart—if I felt assured that I could never change? I was sometimes hurt as well as afflicted by these reiterated questionings, which I could not help fancying argued distrust on his part of the sincerity of my affection. But he would assure me in such glowing and impassioned terms that he knew beforehand what my answers would be, and was so convinced of their sincerity, that the momentarily inflicted wound was healed in my heart and my sorrow vanished. Then he would tell me that he only put those questions because it was so sweet to receive the assurances they elicited; and yet in the very next breath he would make me tell him solemnly and sacredly that I had never loved before——I, a young girl only fifteen and a half when I first learnt to love *him!* In these latter questions there was something that more than hurt me—that seemed even to insult me: but when he beheld the tears trickle down my cheeks, he would snatch me in his arms and kiss them rapturously away. Rapturously?—yes, and vehemently too—for there was much wild impulsiveness in that love of his. If I were not always talking to him of our love, he would reproach me with being indifferent—he would even accuse me of being cool and distant—he would express his fears that I did not really love him, but only fancied that I did. Conceive all this to me, a young creature of sixteen whose entire hope of happiness was centred in that man! I was hurt and afflicted—wounded and insulted by those reproaches so unmerited, those accusations so undeserved: and then he would entreat my pardon in the most vehement manner—he would level the bitterest reproaches against himself—he

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would anathematize his own folly—he would make himself miserable by declaring that though we loved so fondly, we were not made for each other. Nor was this all. Sometimes, when we had parted in the most affectionate manner in the evening, he would send me a note the first thing in the morning, to the effect that it struck him I was cool and distant when we separated—he expressed his conviction I had something on my mind—that I looked dull and unhappy—that I had perhaps a secret which I kept from him—that perchance I regretted having promised him my hand: and thus would he conjure up an infinite variety of circumstances which had not the slightest foundation for their existence. He would entreat a few lines in reply, either to assure him of my continued love, or to let him know the worst at once. And I would write back according to the dictates of my heart; and he would speed into my presence, imploring forgiveness for having tortured himself and me. Then he would enjoin me to cheer up—to look happy and gay—to smile—to laugh: and when I could not, or did so only by a forced effort which was but too plainly visible, he would again accuse me of being dull and unhappy—he would make a reproach of the very affliction which he himself had caused me. In this manner did the four months pass away; and it was with the utmost difficulty I could conceal from my uncle and aunt the effects of these frequent interruptions to the even flow of my happiness. Nevertheless, as a general rule, I was *not* unhappy—for when alone, I reflected that all these peculiarities of conduct and varieties of temper on the part of Stephen, were only so many evidences of a profound and deathless love, which ought to make my heart grateful even amidst the very pangs they caused it to experience."

Again the Countess paused with a renewed feeling of exhaustion, and not to collect her thoughts: for the tide of these flowed rapidly in upon her brain, and she had but to cast her mind upon the current in order to give them adequate expression. The sensation of fatigue quickly passed away in the excitement of her discourse; and she continued in the following terms:—

"You perceive, my dear Broughton, that this is an analysis of a human heart upon which I have entered—the heart of my husband!—and you will comprehend presently wherefore I thus dwell upon such minute details, and why the dissection of that heart is so carefully made. I have already hinted that there was something wild and impulsive in the Earl's love—I may add that it was romantic and feverish. Oftentimes would he burst forth into the most impassioned delineations of that love of his: he would compare it to the burning brilliancy of the noon-day sun, and would tell me that mine resembled only the reflection which the earth caught thereof. At other times he would seize me forcibly by the wrist—grasp it till he hurt me—and with a strange wildness in his look, would declare that it was a fearful thing to love as he loved; for that he was giving to a human creature the adoration which properly belonged only to the Creator. Thus did he frighten me with the vehemence of his manner and the singularity of his words: but in his milder and more tender moods, he was so endearing and affectionate that he amply repaid me for whatever transient anxieties and afflictions he thus caused me to experience. But one evening, within three or four days of the one fixed for our bridal, a scene took place which I must specially note. There was a large garden attached to the house where I dwelt with my relatives: and on that particular evening I had rambled with the Earl until a somewhat later hour than usual. It was the month of August; and the weather was warm and delicious. For some time, on the occasion of this ramble, the discourse was unruffled by a single word on his part to cause me pain. Never indeed had his manner been more endearing: never was his language more soft—more tender. I really thought that he himself felt that he had sometimes shown too much vehemence towards me—that he regretted it—and that he was endeavouring to make all possible amends. In the silent gratitude of my heart I thanked him: I regarded it as another proof of his love. But I did not express those thanks in words: to do so would have been to revive unpleasant reminiscences, and even appear like a reproach for his faults. The dusk was closing in; and I at length said that, feeling somewhat tired, I would re-enter the house. I do not know whether he were offended that the proposal to go in-doors should emanate from me—or whether some entirely different thought, flashing to his mind, suddenly altered his mood: but so it was—and catching me by the wrist, he bent upon me looks that appeared to burn with living fire as he said, 'Remember, Priscilla, you possess my love! It is a love of romantic wildness: beware how you ever do aught to change this feeling: because from a love so wild would spring the wildest vengeance!'—I was alarmed: I even shrank from him. It was natural enough; for the horrifying fear took possession of me that he was suddenly going mad and would do me a mischief. He became almost enraged: he conjured me to tell him, by everything I deemed sacred, that I really loved him. My lips tremulously framed the answer he sought: and he appeared pacified. We entered the house: he remained for about another hour, his manner having resumed all its affectionate tenderness—his discourse its melting suavity. When he took his leave, I thought that he went away completely happy. But when I ascended to my own chamber, a sudden idea struck me as if with a violent blow; and dispensing with the services of my maid, I sat down to ponder upon it. Was it possible that Stephen thought I loved him only for his title and his wealth?—or rather that I was affecting a love which my soul experienced not? I was shocked at the bare idea that such hideous selfishness could be imputed to me. But was he so ungenerous as to entertain such a suspicion? Alas, I feared so: or else wherefore those constantly reiterated questions relative to my love? wherefore those repeated adjurations that I would search well my own heart and analyze my feelings ere I again gave him the assurance that I did love? I was portionless—my prospects on the part of my relatives were but small, as I have already stated—and therefore it might be deemed natural that I should do my best to acquire a social position, with name and rank. But, Oh! as I wept bitter burning tears while thus giving way to my reflections, I said to myself that I would sooner break off the match at once, notwithstanding the sincere truthfulness of my love, than suffer it to

progress and have that love suspected. I therefore made up my mind to speak very seriously to the Earl of Castlemaine on the following day, and beseech him to let everything end at once between us, unless in his own heart he entertained the conviction that my love was purely and disinterestedly devoted to him. You may well suppose, my dear Broughton, that while engaged in such reflections as these, I had no inclination to sleep. I had not even begun to lay aside my apparel: I had thrown myself on an ottoman at the foot of the bed—and there had I remained giving way to those painful thoughts. Nevertheless the time had passed quickly away: it was half-an hour after midnight. The weather was sultry—the night was oppressive—and the excitement of my feelings added to the natural heat. My cheeks burnt as if in a fever—my temples throbbed—I felt as if I were about to faint. I opened one of the casements: my chamber was at the back of the house, and looked upon the garden: there was consequently no impropriety in thus going to the window to let the air, if there were a breath stirring, fan my countenance. The night was beautifully clear—so bright indeed that the smallest print might have been read; and a gentle breeze did spring up at the time—so that it blew refreshingly on my throbbing brows and feverish cheeks. I lingered at that open window, gazing up into the moon-lit heavens, and sighing for an in-draught to my soul of that serenity which appeared to prevail above! When about to withdraw from the casement, my looks fell upon the garden; and I started in mingled astonishment and terror, on beholding the form of a man motionless in the midst of the grass-plat which was almost immediately under my window. My first impression was that it must be one of the men-servants—my second that it was a robber: but my third, which instantaneously became a conviction, was that the Earl of Castlemaine himself was the individual stationed there. Yes: there could be no doubt of it! I recognized his form—his attitude—his very garments. He was standing with his arms folded across his chest—his looks bent down, as if in the deepest meditation. And he remained so motionless too, that it seemed as if he had been turned into a statue. Good heavens! what could this mean? A thousand varied and conflicting thoughts swept through my mind. Was he jealous, and had he come to watch my movements? was his object of even a darker character, and more criminally insulting to the purity of my own character? or in the romantic wildness of his love, had he come to woo me down to a renewal of our evening ramble in the garden? or, more tenderly romantic still, had he come only to be near the dwelling which harboured the object of his adoration? These were a few of the hurried and excited questions that I put to myself. You may wonder, Mrs. Broughton, that such reflections should have suggested themselves to a young maiden of but four months over sixteen: but during those four months my eyes had been opened to many pages of the book of experience—to many readings of the human heart. Love is a great teacher—but more so when it displays itself in such wayward moods, wild humours, and impassioned phases as did that of the Earl of Castlemaine."

The Countess again paused: but this time it was only for a few moments; and she quickly resumed her narrative, which deepened in interest as it progressed.

"I was rivetted to the casement for some minutes, not knowing what to think or how to act. To my increased astonishment, the Earl did not once look up at the window: but there he stood—motionless—with his arms folded over his chest, and his eyes bent down, so that I did not obtain a glimpse of his countenance. I grew frightened: a superstitious terror came over me. Could it be possible that I beheld the spiritual image of one who physically and in earthly shape was elsewhere—perhaps slumbering in his couch at his own residence? This apprehension was speedily augmented into absolute torture, so that I lost as it were the fear of encountering an apparition in the anxiety to ascertain if such it really were. In one sense therefore I became suddenly nerved with a strange fortitude. There the figure remained—still motionless—still with arms folded — still with looks cast down. I hesitated no longer: my feelings were terrible — it was absolutely necessary that I should go and see what this was and what it meant — it was a mystery too appalling not to be cleared up at once. I did descend: the house was quiet—no one heard me opening the back door—and I stepped forth into the garden. My first feeling was one of a cold shudder as I flung my looks in the direction of the grass-plat, expecting to behold that figure still there: but it was gone. Then my eyes were swept wildly all around: but no living object, nor the semblance of one, met my view. I was now shockingly frightened; and as I hastily re-ascended the stairs to my chamber, I shuddered and recoiled under the apprehension that the cold hand of death might suddenly be laid upon my bare shoulder. I put off my apparel and went to bed: but it was not till long after the sun had risen that sleep visited my eyes. Then I beheld the whole incident enacted over again in a dream—the figure on the grass-plat, motionless as a statue, with folded arms, and face bent downward! When I awoke I felt cold as ice; and collecting my thoughts, I endeavoured to ascertain whether the whole had been a dream and that I had not really gone to the window at all, nor seen the figure, nor descended into the garden. I knew not what to think. On the one hand there appeared to be the conviction that the incident was real, and that it had been repeated in a dream: but then, on the other hand, was my own endeavour to believe that it was *all* a dream, and to persuade myself that it was so. I resolved to keep the circumstance locked up in my own bosom, and not to speak of it unless the Earl himself should mention it. He came, as usual, soon after breakfast: he was happy, cheerful, and loving: he brought me handsome presents, which he had purposely caused to be sent down from London; and he talked joyously of the proximity of the wedding-day as he imprinted kisses on my cheeks. Then he spoke of our love: he volunteered his conviction that mine was as sincere and earnest though not so impassioned as his own;—and throughout that day not a single unpleasant word ruffled the harmony of our minds. How, therefore, could I carry into effect my resolution of the previous evening—to beg that everything might be broken off unless he were thoroughly convinced of the disinterested and unselfish quality of my love? No—

I could not: nor did I wish to do so: there appeared to be no necessity now for such a serious step. But not a syllable fell from his lips relative to the incident of the past night; and therefore I concluded that it must have been all a dream: for I could not bring myself to fancy that I had seen an apparition—and if it were he in person, how could he thus avoid making any allusion to the topic?—for he must have known that I had opened my window and seen him there. Assuredly, I thought to myself, it was naught but a dream!"

The Countess paused and remained silent for some minutes. Mrs. Broughton made no remark: she was deeply anxious to hear the remainder of the narrative which had already acquired so profound an interest.

"The Earl took his leave of me that evening in a cheerful and affectionate manner," resumed the Countess, — "whispering to me as he went away that we should soon be united no more to part. I ascended to my chamber: but when I reached it a superstitious terror, vague and undefined, seized upon me; and I instantaneously felt that if I were to seek my couch at once, I should vainly endeavour to close my eyes—for that an irresistible fascination would attract me to the window at about the same hour as on the preceding night, to send my shuddering looks forth and see if the same object presented itself on the grass-plat. So I dismissed the maid at once, and sat down to give way to my reflections. With respect however to the impossibility of sleeping I was wrong; for gradually did slumber steal upon me—and though I slept not soundly, yet was I plunged into a state of dreamy repose, in which the faculty of accurate perception and reasoning was lost. I was awakened up by hearing my name pronounced. '*Priscilla!*'—the summons came from the garden—not loud, but yet clear and unmistakable, in the Earl's voice. '*Priscilla!*'—the summons was repeated. I started up wildly. '*Priscilla!*'—a third time did my own name, thus sent up from the garden, reach my ears. Then it must be *he*, I thought to myself: and my superstitious terrors vanished: but as I passed the mirror on my way to the casement, I caught sight of my countenance by aid of the wax-candles burning on the toilet-table; and I saw that it was pale as death. And no wonder—for I had at first been fearfully alarmed. I drew aside the curtains — I opened the window — I looked forth — and there was the Earl, or at least his image, standing on the grass-plat below. His face was upturned to the casement: the silver flood of moonlight poured upon it, and in that argentine reflection it seemed white and ghastly as that of a corpse! I shuddered to the uttermost confines of my being: methought I gazed upon a ghost. He beckoned me to come down to him. I obeyed mechanically—with an awful horror in my soul, and yet without the power to remain where I was, to cry out, to summon assistance, or to go elsewhere than down the staircase leading towards the back entrance to the house. But when I opened the door and gazed forth, no one was upon the grass-plat. Then, all in an instant I found myself nerved with a degree of fortitude as sudden as it was wonderful: I hastened round the garden —I looked everywhere—but no human being, nor any image of one, met my view. I went back to my chamber, bewildered—not knowing what to think. I fell upon my knees, and prayed long and fervently to heaven, imploring that if this were meant as a preternatural warning for any wise purpose of the Omnipotent, some farther sign might be vouchsafed to convince me of its reality—some sign that would leave no doubt behind, but would be unquestionably convincing. I rose from my knees, almost expecting that something of the kind would take place. I went again to the window, and looked forth: but I beheld nothing more to startle or dismay me. I sought my couch; and strange as it may seem, it is not the less a fact that sleep almost immediately visited my eyes. When I awoke in the morning, I did not remember having dreamt of anything."

"And did you not, dear lady, on that occasion," asked Mrs. Broughton, perceiving that the Countess paused again, "speak to his lordship on the mysterious subject?"

"No—I did not," responded the Countess of Castlemaine; "and I will tell you wherefore. He came at the usual hour, and seemed so cheerful and so happy that I could not find it in my heart to mention the circumstance. For I reasoned to myself that if it were *he* in person whom I had seen upon the grass-plat, he must have wandered forth from his own residence in a very perturbed state of mind—and that as he did not now make the slightest allusion to the incident, it was natural to suppose he sought to banish it from his recollection. But if on the other hand it was really an unearthly and preterhuman image of himself—what in some countries would be called *a fetch*—I dared not strike sadness into his soul by acquainting him with the terrific warning thus given. In my own heart, however, I was exceedingly unhappy—though I struggled with an almost incredible energy to veil my sorrow and appear in good spirits. He did not notice on this occasion that there was an under-current of melancholy feeling beneath the smiles that I put on and the gaiety that I endeavoured to throw into my language: nor throughout that day did he exhibit any of those peculiarities of mood or eccentricities of temper which I have been endeavouring to describe. When night came I shuddered to find myself once more ascending to my chamber: I even resolved to go to bed at once, and not look forth from the casement. But this determination I had not strength of mind sufficient to put into force: an irresistible power — something more awfully solemn than mere curiosity — compelled me to sit up, and at midnight to glance from the window. But I beheld nothing to alarm or bewilder me: the grass-plat was unoccupied. I had the courage to sit for nearly an hour at the casement to watch if aught would appear: and it was a considerable relief to my feelings to retire to rest without having been again terrified or dismayed by the unaccountable presence of my intended husband or his preternatural counterpart. Then, again I asked myself, 'Were the incidents of the two preceding nights naught but dreams?'—I would have given worlds to be able to believe them so: but I could not—no, I could not! I will not however dwell at any unnecessary length upon my narrative. The following day passed happily enough: the ensuing night was undisturbed; and on the morn that followed I became Countess of Castlemaine. The

honeymoon was passed at this mansion; and it was about two months after the marriage that you, Broughton, entered my service."

Her ladyship paused for a few moments, and then resumed the narration of her wild and singular story:—

"You have already heard enough to make you comprehend that my husband's temper had its wayward moods—I may even be pardoned if I denominate them infirmities. I loved him so tenderly—so devotedly—that I was fully prepared to adapt myself to his humours and accommodate myself to his ways. I saw that he loved me with an excess of ardour not often shown by even the most adoring of men; and for such an amount of love I could well afford to endure the eccentricities into which my husband might be betrayed by the very intenseness of that passion. Time wore on—and I found that my experiences before marriage in respect to the Earl's temper, were perpetuated afterwards; and the two great objects of my care were to avoid giving him the slightest cause of offence—and to prevent the world, or even our own household, from becoming aware of the scenes which frequently disturbed our domestic bliss. But I must now enter into details with regard to them. I cannot exactly say that his lordship was jealous: but there were times when he was haunted by the fear that the sincerity of his own love was not fully reciprocated by me. If he beheld me in low spirits he would at once take it upon himself to assert that he knew I regretted having linked my destiny to his own; and even when I solemnly and sacredly assured him that my heart clung to him with all the power of woman's devotion, he seemed not to give me credit for truthfulness. Frequently, when in the midst of a calm and tranquil conversation, he would suddenly start up from his seat, fix his looks upon me, and vehemently proclaim that he was guilty of a crime in loving me with such an intensity of passion; for that I had become the idol of his worship, and that he was an idolator! The assurance of such an illimitable love would have been joyous instead of saddening: but it was accompanied with such strange vehemence of manner—and I may even add, with looks so terrible—that I was both frightened and afflicted. And then, because I turned pale or instinctively shrank back, he would taunt me with coldness—with want of affection—even with harbouring a sentiment of aversion towards him. At other times he would calmly and deliberately assure me that if he thought I did not really love him, he would fly from the world and bury himself in some solitude, to brood over his woes in secret. On such occasions as these I scarcely knew how to act: for if I entreated him to put away such dreadful ideas from his mind, he would angrily charge me with an attempt to tutor himself into the same indifference which he accused me of feeling;—and if, fearful of provoking words, I held my peace he would then at once discover in that silence a proof of the very indifference of which I was accused. In short, he conjured up a thousand phantoms to haunt himself wherewith: the love that he bore for me was a source of affliction instead of happiness to his own heart. Heaven knows how carefully I studied to discipline my conduct—to regulate my very words and looks—so as to avoid giving him pain. Fearful that he might become downright jealous, I never went into society save when accompanied by his lordship: I never danced—I never would give the slightest encouragement to that homage which a young lady in my position might naturally expect from the other sex. But even in thus maintaining so rigid a guard over my conduct, I found that I was often wrong in my husband's estimation. He would reproach me for being dull and unhappy—for being dispirited and despondent—for moping and pining—and for being unlike all other women. What was I to do? If I abandoned myself to the giddy whirl of fashionable frivolity—if I accepted flatteries and encouraged adulation—I foresaw that still more potent impulses would be given to the Earl's eccentricities of temper: but on the other hand, the extreme steadiness of my conduct was made a reproach! Nevertheless, every motive of prudence as well as my own natural inclination suggested a perseverance in the latter course: and I did persevere. About eighteen months after my marriage, as you will recollect, my uncle and aunt were both carried off by a malignant fever; and I was stricken with sorrow. For a few weeks the Earl appeared to experience the most delicate consideration for my feelings: but at length he began to regard my continued despondency as an ill-compliment to himself—and I was told that there was no earthly grief so great but that it ought to be solaced by the presence of a fond and loving husband. Now, my dear Broughton, have I succeeded after all this mass of verbiage in making you comprehend the intricacies and peculiarities of Lord Castlemaine's heart?"

"Yes, my dear lady," responded the faithful dependant, "you have indeed lifted a veil from the Earl's character. I understand him fully now! The love which he experienced for you was so impassioned and enthusiastic as to be absolutely selfish—and it rendered him a tyrant. He fancied that you ought not to cast a look, harbour an idea, or even respire a breath that had not some reference to himself:—to him you were to be all in all—to identify yourself with his feelings—to dream, to think, to look, to speak only beneath the dominant influence of love. You were to be *all* love—to make your wedded life one unceasing honeymoon! And it was natural—indeed, it was inevitable—that a man of such a disposition should torture himself and you with a thousand phantom fears—a thousand ridiculous suspicions. It was to be a constant study on both your parts to testify the love thus mutually felt: it was not to be a love to flow on in an even course like the unruffled stream,—but to gush with continuous excitement—and the greater its impetuosity, the better! And yet, my lady, the world suspected not that such was your lord's disposition: the household suspected it not either. On the contrary, the Earl of Castlemaine has ever passed for a nobleman of a temperament coldly reserved—may I venture to add, haughtily frigid?"

"Yes," replied the Countess, "that is doubtless his natural character in all things save with respect to the affection which he conceived for me. And when the power of this love so mightily stirred up the very depths of his soul, that outward composure on his part was still worn before the world as a

mask to conceal the perturbed state of his mind within. His pride—in respect to which he is most keenly sensitive—enabled him to sustain this outward composure, and to guard himself from ever being betrayed into those same paroxysms to which he has been excited when alone with me. Now, do not think, Broughton, that I am saying all this in disparagement of my husband. No—heaven forbid! I have loved him devotedly—I have never ceased to love him—I love him now——yes, at this moment as much as ever! But why am I telling you all these things? In the first place, it is because I had resolved to make you my confidante, in order to prepare you for a service which I shall presently seek at your hands; and in the second place it is to account for that separation of chambers—that partial alienation indeed—which took place between us about four years back. The Earl, as you have by this time understood, conjured up a thousand imaginary evils wherewith to torture both himself and me: but all this mechanism for racking us both, turned upon one pivot—namely, the idea that his love was not fully reciprocated. Well, to abridge my narrative as much as possible, I must inform you that he at length declared he had come to the conclusion that we were not fitted for each other—that we were never intended for one another—that it was a great fault on the part of each to link our destinies at the altar—and that as he saw he was making me miserable, he had resolved to give me in future as little of his society as possible. I was thunderstruck when he one day deliberately made me these announcements. Because I did not immediately fling myself into his arms, nor throw myself at his feet, and in vehement language proclaim the contrary of all he had asserted,—he took my conduct as another proof of indifference: whereas the real truth is that I was too deeply smitten with dismay to be mistress of myself. He abruptly left the room where this scene took place: and on subsequently repairing to my own chamber, overwhelmed with grief, I found a letter upon the toilet-table, announcing his future intentions. Give me my desk, Broughton—and you shall read it."

The letter was accordingly produced; and its contents ran in the following manner:—

"September 16th, 1840.

"It is not in anger that I write, my dearest Priscilla—but in sorrow. I must repeat what I said just now; we are not fitted for each other. I love you so much that perhaps my very love makes me a tyrant towards you. It may be so: but in that case I am the more to be pitied, because mine is an affection which must be incessantly gratified by a thousand little evidences of fondness—and therefore indifference kills me. I may exact too much: but I am the sufferer when experiencing disappointment. However the case may be, my mind is made up. We will henceforth see each other as little as possible: we will occupy different suites of apartments: but before the world our deportment shall be such as to defy calumny and give no scope for scandal. When accident throws us alone together, the word *love* must never again pass our lips. I charge you to obey me in this—I charge you not to seek by remonstrance, either written or spoken, to deter me from my resolution! If you do, that moment will I fly away from your presence altogether—and you shall never hear of me again. Understand me well therefore, Priscilla: *the consequences will be terrible if you disobey me!* We shall meet presently at the dinner table: let it be with the frank familiarity which subsists between husband and wife—and nothing more. Do not even cast a look upon me, nor steal one *at* me, which may convey a reproach an appeal, or a remonstrance. I am decided—and it is more for your sake than mine that I have come to this determination. I have no right to make you unhappy and torture you continuously: but if we dwell together as heretofore, I cannot possibly alter my behaviour towards you. It is only by a separation as great as circumstances will permit—by a mutual alienation as complete as we can render it—that a barrier may be raised up to protect you against the torturing influences which have hitherto been shed upon you. Again therefore do I conjure—command—entreat—and implore that henceforth we reside beneath the same roof on the terms that I have laid down.

"Your husband,
"CASTLEMAINE."

Mrs. Broughton could offer no comment upon this singular epistle: she dared not. It was evidently the emanation of a mind in a singularly morbid state. It constituted a hideous cruelty towards a wife who was accused of no crime—not even charged with the slightest act of levity: but on the other hand, the Earl could scarcely be held responsible for the deed, inasmuch as it was not perpetrated in wilful wickedness—it was the act of one who, sane in all other respects, was a monomaniac with regard to the love which his heart cherished.

"How could I behave," continued the Countess of Castlemaine, "in the face of a letter such as that? The agonizing thought seized upon me that my unfortunate husband's intellect was impaired on one particular point—and that if I thwarted his will, those *terrible consequences* to which he had so vaguely yet fearfully alluded, might ensue. Oh! what would I have given to speed to his apartment and fling myself at his feet? Such indeed was my first impulse: but I conquered it. I shuddered at the idea of driving him into complete and irreparable frenzy. I therefore bent to an imperious necessity,—deriving however some little solace from the reflection that in a very short time he of his own accord would adopt a conciliatory course. Four years have elapsed since then—and you know, Broughton, how we have lived together. But no—you do *not* know it all—you do *not* know that my husband still cherishes for me the same illimitable love as at first——"

Here the Countess stopped short suddenly, and her cheeks were suffused with blushes: she was all in a moment overwhelmed with confusion, while the tears were trickling down her cheeks. And—stranger inconsistency still—there was a partial smile upon her lips. Mrs. Broughton gazed upon her in astonishment. Bewildered as she had all along been in respect to the mysteries which evidently hung around the conduct of the Countess, she was now, if possible, more bewildered still. Was her ladyship innocent, that she could thus smile as she expressed the conviction of her husband's unaltered and still illimitable love? or were not those blushes and that confusion the evidences of conscious guilt? But those tears—they did not seem tears wrung forth by the stings of conscience, nor by the sense of shame: they appeared to flow over those blushing cheeks like a warm Spring-shower upon the damask leaves of the rose.

"And in respect, dear lady," Mrs. Broughton said, at length breaking silence, "to those mysterious incidents at your uncle's house, a few nights before your marriage—did you never clear them

up? did you never breathe a word to his lordship——"

"No—never, never!" ejaculated the Countess vehemently. "Never!"—then, after a long pause, she slowly added, "But the time is now come!"

Again did the Countess stop short; and it struck Mrs. Broughton that while her ladyship had something on the tip of her tongue to reveal, she nevertheless liked not to give it utterance. And that this conjecture was right on the dependant's part, was speedily proven by the observations which her mistress went on to make.

"No—I cannot finish my narrative now," she said murmuringly: "I am afraid that I have already spoken too much—the excitement has been great! But you will soon know all. And now listen attentively, Broughton—and render me the service which I am about to seek at your hands. You promise me that you will—do you not?"

"Beyond all doubt, my lady," was the answer, —"if it be consistent——"

"Yes—you will find that it is nothing which you may not do," interrupted the Countess. "Indeed you have already done it."

Mrs. Broughton looked astonished.

"Did you not tell me the other day," inquired the Countess, "when you spoke of those intrusions —you know what I mean—that you watched in the hope of catching the intruder? Well then, all the service I require at your hands is that you will do the same to-night—and to-morrow night, if it be necessary—and every night until you succeed in the object. Ask me no questions—force me not to say any more at present—I am exhausted—I shall experience a relapse. But yet one word more—— Let your measures be so well taken that if the intruder once again enters these apartments, he shall not escape till you have spoken with him."

"And what am I to say, my lady?" inquired the astonished Mrs. Broughton.

"Whatsoever circumstances may suggest," rejoined the Countess of Castlemaine.

CHAPTER CXV.

THE INTRUDER.

It was eleven o'clock at night; and her ladyship, though much fatigued by the long discourse she had held with her dependant, was unable to compose herself to sleep. Nevertheless, she lay with her eyes closed, and in perfect silence. Mrs. Broughton was seated near the table, reflecting profoundly upon all that her mistress had told her, but wondering why the narrative had been left incomplete, and that nothing was said to clear up the mysterious circumstances which had immediately preceded the marriage of the Countess,—nothing moreover in the form of a confession of frailty nor a proclamation of innocence,—nothing, in a word, to account for the condition of approaching maternity in which her ladyship found herself. But wherefore was such reserve maintained on all these points? It was true that the Countess had alleged fatigue and exhaustion as the motive for stopping short: but Mrs. Broughton felt convinced it was not the true one, and that her ladyship was not so thoroughly wearied as to have been unable to say a few words more. However, Mrs. Broughton had received the assurance that she would soon know everything; and it was not so much through a curiosity acutely piqued, as for the sake of a lady whom she sincerely loved, and for that of a nobleman whom she had learnt to pity, that she anxiously longed for an elucidation of all these mysteries,—being not without the hope that it might be for the best instead of for the worst.

The time-piece in the boudoir had proclaimed the hour of eleven, when Mrs. Broughton rose to take her measures for carrying out the task assigned to her by the Countess, and which indeed was but a repetition of the course she had already adopted of her own accord. Rising gently from her seat, she approached the couch: her ladyship opened her eyes for a moment—gave her a look expressive of gratitude—and then closing them again, settled the expression of her countenance into that of a calm repose. The faithful attendant thereupon issued forth from the chamber, closing the door behind her. She had ordered the nurse not to come to take her turn of watching until between one and two in the morning; and thus she had a considerable interval before her wherein to wait for the presence of the intruder if he should take it into his head to come. Of this however Mrs. Broughton considered there was little probability, inasmuch as several nights had now elapsed without seeing him return; and she fancied that after the loss of the letter, he would be in no hurry to repeat his visits. But all these things she had not represented to the Countess —whose bidding, on the contrary, she had promised to do: and therefore was it that she thus entered upon the task.

The boudoir, the parlour, and the ante-room were all three enveloped in total darkness: for the curtains were completely drawn over the windows—there were no lights in these three apartments—nor yet any fires in the grates. Mrs. Broughton fancied she could not do better than station herself in the ante-room on the present occasion; so that should the intruder revisit the place, she might at once secure the door and thus make him completely a prisoner until she should choose to emancipate him again. She felt her way to that door—she assured herself that the key was in the lock—and she then took a seat in its immediate vicinity.

We will not again pause at any considerable length to analyse her reflections while she thus remained stationed there: but we will content ourselves with observing that the thought which was uppermost in her mind was in the form of a query which she kept putting to herself, but for which she could find no reasonable solution. It was this: —"Wherefore has her ladyship enjoined me this task? why is she so anxious to put me in communication with one who must doubtless be a stranger to me? and why should she seem confident that he will make his appearance either to-night or very shortly?"

An hour passed away—the time-piece in the boudoir proclaimed midnight—and Mrs. Broughton was still at her post,—wide awake,—faithfully keeping watch,—and listening with suspended breath to catch the slightest sound that might seem to herald the approach of a visitor. The metallic cadence of the last stroke of the clock was still vibrating

through the apartments, when her ear distinctly caught the sound of a foot-fall in the corridor leading to the ante-room. She rose up gently from her seat—she stood in readiness to secure the door—and again she listened. Yes—she was not deceived: footsteps were approaching slowly, and as if the individual were advancing in a manner that was rather deliberate than actually cautious,—for though the steps seemed measured, yet the tread might have been lighter. Those steps ceased at the door: then she heard the handle turn—the door opened slowly—and some one passed into the room. The individual, whoever he was, closed the door and advanced farther into the apartment. Then Mrs. Broughton lost not a moment in turning the key in the lock, taking it out, and securing it about her person. This being done, she listened in the expectation that the intruder, becoming alarmed, would say or do something. But no such thing! He spoke not a word; and she heard his footsteps continue to advance, as if he were either totally unconscious or else reckless of the presence of another person in that dark room. Then she grew frightened: she knew not what to think: there was something terribly mysterious in the entire proceeding. A cold perspiration broke out upon her forehead: she felt the blood curdling in her veins. But this panic on her part was only transient: naturally a strong-minded woman, she quickly recovered her self-possession; and she followed in the footsteps of the intruder, for the purpose of clutching him by the arm and compelling him to speak. But then the thought flashed to her mind, that if being so deeply absorbed in the mystic purpose for which he had come, he was too suddenly startled into the consciousness of detection, he might deal her a blow—he might use violence to escape—he might do her a mischief. So she resolved to wait a few moments and ascertain what course he was about to adopt. He was safely a prisoner there; and she could address him at any instant she chose,—while any attempt he might make to fly would be frustrated by the door being locked.

He passed on through the parlour, she following him. He entered the boudoir; and she was now close upon his track. He was making his way direct to the bed-chamber of her mistress,—when arming herself with all her courage, she stretched forth her hand at random, and clutching him by his garments, said in a quick firm voice, "No! whoever you are, you enter not there!"

The individual seemed suddenly shaken by a strong convulsive spasm: but he made no effort to escape from Mrs. Broughton's grasp. For the space of a dozen moments a profound silence followed the words she had spoken: then a sudden but low and half stifled ejaculation of dismay burst from the lips of the intruder;—and stretching forth his arms, he caught violently hold of Mrs. Broughton, exclaiming, "Who are you? where am I?"

Heavens! it was the voice of the Earl of Castlemaine himself!

"Oh, my lord! my lord!" cried Mrs. Broughton, a sudden thrill of exultant joy passing through her entire frame as she was smitten with the conviction of her lady's innocence: "pardon me for the way I spoke—pardon me for my rudeness in laying hands upon you——"

"Good God! where am I?" exclaimed the Earl, more wildly than before: "where am I? what does it all mean?"

"One moment, my lord!" quickly responded Mrs. Broughton: and disengaging herself from his grasp, she opened the door leading into the bed-chamber.

The light of the candles flooded forth upon the countenance of the Earl of Castlemaine; and for an instant it was terrible and ghastly to behold: for every lineament expressed a terror half wild, half stupifying, as if the unhappy nobleman had just been startled out of his sleep. And it was so. Mrs. Broughton had comprehended it all in an instant:—the Earl of Castlemaine was a somnambulist!

"My lord," she hastened to say, taking him by the hand and compelling him to sit down on a chair in the boudoir, but near the open door of the bed-chamber, "compose yourself—tranquillize your feelings, I conjure you! Oh, my lord! you ought to be happy—for—for——you are not dishonoured! Do you not understand me?"

These last words she had uttered in a whispering voice; and Lord Castlemaine,—who, for the previous few moments had been gazing in a sort of wild vacancy and appalled stupefaction around him,—was suddenly galvanized by the thrilling conviction that it sent in to his very soul. He started up into the full vitality and keen perception of fullest wakefulness: his countenance became animated—joy, wonder, and exultation expanded thereon—and then wildly crying, "Yes, she is innocent! she is innocent!" he rushed into the bed-chamber.

"Pardon, my angel—pardon!" he exclaimed, as he threw himself upon his knees by the side of the couch; and taking the hand which his wife extended to him, he pressed it to his lips.

Mrs. Broughton discreetly closed the door of that chamber,—she herself not crossing the threshold; but sitting down in the darkness of the boudoir, she wept plenteously for very joy. Her mistress was innocent—and she was happy, this good woman! —Oh, supremely happy!

Several minutes elapsed before she could so far collect her thoughts and compose her feelings as to remember that she had locked the outer door and had secured the key in her pocket. Ah! there was no need now to retain the intruder captive and extort from him a promise that he would not revisit the place: for never was intruder more welcome, or never more certain to come back again, after the scene of reconciliation which she knew full well was at that instant taking place in the bed-chamber adjoining. The sounds of impassioned language reached her ears,—words of entreaty from the lips of the Earl that his Priscilla would forgive him all the past,—words, too, of glowing promise that thenceforth his constant study should be to render her really happy! Mrs. Broughton, on thus obtaining the certainty that the reconciliation *was* complete, issued from the boudoir—unlocked the ante-room door—and proceeded to her own chamber to enjoy the luxury of her reflections until she might think it proper to return to the apartments of her mistress.

It might be supposed that, after the long illness which the Countess of Castlemaine had experienced, this scene with her husband would prove too much for her, and that she would faint away beneath its

almost overpowering influence. But it was not so: the excitement of thrilling bliss following upon acute suspense, appeared to revive her lost strength and resuscitate the energies which indisposition had paralyzed. Oh! to faint away from the sense of renewed happiness which she now enjoyed, would be as it were to die out of paradise;—and Lady Castlemaine experienced too vivid a delight—too thrilling an ecstacy—not to feel her entire form glowing as it were with the vital warmth of a new existence. It was fresh life that was infused into her: it was a new state of being into which she found herself transported. We shall not make the slightest attempt to reproduce here the precise terms in which full explanations presently took place between the husband and wife: but we shall in a narrative form furnish the reader with the sense and tenour thereof.

Enough has been gleaned from the history which Lady Castlemaine breathed in the ears of Mrs. Broughton, to show that the Earl was a man of peculiar disposition. There were certain defects in his temper, and a morbidness of the mind, which were purely constitutional,—not to be attributed to any other cause, nor emanating from any untoward circumstances of his earlier life. For indeed, his existence had been marked by no misfortunes, save those which may be termed of his own creating, or which arose from the infirmities of his character. Whenever enjoying happiness, he was always suspicious of it; and thus the drop of gall had been invariably mingled in the cup of sweets. When he first learnt to love Priscilla, he tortured himself with the idea that as he was twelve years older than she, it was scarcely possible she loved him for himself alone. Yet if he deliberated calmly and rationally on the subject, he knew that it was so. His own good sense—his power to estimate the human character—and the thousand and one little evidences which tend to prove a disinterested attachment,

all spoke in favour of Priscilla: yet, as if he could not help flying in the face of all evidence, and doubting as it were his very convictions, did he thus torture himself with imaginary apprehensions. This produced a restlessness of spirit that rendered him a somnambulist; and hence those wanderings at night-time when he appeared beneath Priscilla's window at her uncle's house, and when his statue-like attitude on the grass-plat filled her with such a bewildering terror. After their marriage he continued, as the reader has learnt from Lady Castlemaine's lips, to torture himself in the same manner as before; and thus his feelings were worked up by the morbid action of his imagination to such a pitch, that he actually came to the conclusion they were unfitted for each other, and that they ought to separate so far as circumstances would allow. Not for a moment did he ever suspect her purity or mistrust her honour; and he knew that his own temper was to a certain extent the cause of her unhappiness. From the letter which he wrote to his wife, the reader has seen he was thus far sensible of his own unfortunate disposition as to comprehend that the very magnitude of his love rendered him a tyrant. It was therefore as much out of consideration for Priscilla as in obedience to the promptings of his own diseased mind and uneasy spirit, that he insisted on that separation of chambers. His object was that they should keep as much apart as possible, so that she might be removed from the influence of his unfortunate temper, and he himself might be debarred from the circumstances and occasions which developed its infirmities.

But in the hours of slumber his soul was wide awake—his mind slept not; and thus in the wanderings of somnambulism was he led towards the object of his love,—that love so deep, so wild, so eccentric! It was an irresistible attraction exercising its power over his mind when the mystic spell of sleep was upon the body,—and his wife comprehended that it was so. Often and often did she think of revealing to him, when they met in the day-time, how he sought her at night: but she shrank, with a feeling of delicacy and shame which cannot fail to be understood, from making such a confession. She often thought seriously, too, of writing in a letter what she dared not avow with the lips; and on many and many an occasion did she take pen and paper to commence that strange mysterious revelation: but she knew not how to find language even for the very commencement. And it was not only that sense of delicacy and shame which thus sealed her lips, and paralyzed the hand when it took up the pen; but it was also the fear of causing her husband a shock which might be fatal to his intellects: for she saw full well that he entertained not the slightest suspicion that he was a somnambulist. Thus did time wear on; and the secret remained inviolable in her bosom.

We must now observe that in the solitude of his own chamber—in the day-time, when wide awake, and often of an evening ere retiring to his couch—Lord Castlemaine would draw forth from his desk some letters that he had received from Priscilla during the time of his courtship; and it was to him a melancholy pleasure to read and re-peruse them over and over again. Perhaps he was wont to do the same when under the influence of that mystic power which made him a somnambulist: but certain it is that the letter which Mrs. Broughton picked up one night in the sitting-room, and which she had since kept, was written by Priscilla to the Earl himself at the time of his wooing. If the reader will refer to it again, he will find that it must have been in reply to some note penned by the Earl in one of his excited humours of doubt and uncertainty as to Priscilla's love. From the fact that when in a state of somnambulism he had taken that letter with him on the night that it fell into Mrs. Broughton's hands, it may easily be supposed that he had actually been reading it in his sleep; and that, believing as he did at the time that his wife had dishonoured him, he was prompted to take it to her chamber, to reproach her for having proved faithless to the energetic assurances of love contained therein.

It is well known to those who are acquainted with psychological phenomena, that somnambulists often display an extraordinary amount of wariness and caution in order to escape observation. In this respect they frequently give evidence of that same species of cunning which inspires lunatics; and to this circumstance may be attributed the fact that for so long a period the somnambulistic propensities of the Earl of Castlemaine had continued unknown, and even unsuspected, to every individual of the household, his wife alone excepted. But it appeared that it was only at intervals he was thus seized with fits of somnambulism; and when once the spell was upon him he would continue his sleep-walkings for several nights running. These fits generally took him after his mind had experienced any unusual degree of excitement; and then they would be followed by an interval of many weeks—perhaps even months—before they were renewed. The greater the excitement which acted as the motive cause, the more frequently were the sleep-walkings repeated, and the longer the period of the fit's duration. Thus was it that Lady Castlemaine, who knew his habit so well, felt assured when she set Mrs. Broughton on the watch, that her husband would repeat his visit to her chamber.

When a few days back she had suddenly wakened up and found him standing by her bedside—and when, as she stretched out her arms to him, he fled so precipitately,—she was about to reveal that long-maintained secret the avowal of which had now become necessary to clear up her own honour;—and when she would have afterwards penned a few lines to him, it was that she had made up her mind to commit to paper that revelation which he had afforded her not the opportunity of breathing from her lips. But, as the reader has seen, her strength failed her; and the attempt was followed by a relapse. On coming back to consciousness on the fourth day, she determined to make a confidante of her faithful Broughton,—not merely for the purpose of using the woman's aid to render the Earl acquainted with what she was denied every other opportunity of revealing to him—but also that Mrs. Broughton herself might serve as a witness of the actual occurrence of his somnambulistic visit, and thus under any circumstances be enabled to testify to the honour of her mistress.

It was now, therefore, for the first time that Lord Castlemaine awoke—to speak literally—to the fact that he was a somnambulist; and the reader may

imagine far better than we can describe, how great was the joy which sprang up in his soul when the husband discovered that he was not dishonoured in his wife. The explanations which took place between them occupied a considerable time; and when Mrs. Broughton, after the lapse of a couple of hours, returned to the bed-chamber, she received the warmest thanks from both the Earl and her mistress. It was after his lordship had withdrawn to his own suite of rooms, and when the Countess was repeating what had passed between herself and her husband, that the worthy dependant produced the letter she had picked up, and which at the time had seemed irresistibly to corroborate her idea of her ladyship's frailty. This letter was restored to the Earl in the morning, with an account of how it had fallen into Mrs. Broughton's possession.

When Dr. Ferney made his appearance in the forenoon, the Earl of Castlemaine had a long and very serious conversation with the talented physician. His lordship made him acquainted with everything; and the good-hearted Ferney was overjoyed to learn that the Countess was still in every way worthy of her husband's love.

"Your lordship asks me," he said, "to what treatment I will subject you in order to cure you ot this habit of somnambulism? Physically, I can suggest nothing—because you are abstemious and temperate, regular in your meals, and not addicted to late hours. But mentally I can offer my counsel; and to a certain extent the cure will be in your lordship's own hands. You now find that you possess a wife who dearly loves you. You have tortured yourself with misgivings in respect to an affection the truth and sincerity of which every circumstance has so fully proved. Even when you were merely her suitor and it was not too late for her to retreat from her promise to become your bride, she endured your whims and put up with your humours——Pardon me for speaking thus plainly; but it is requisite. And she did more than all *that*, inasmuch as from the kindest and most delicate feelings she forbore from the slightest allusion to those circumstances which had so much alarmed her, and the least mention of which would have at once shocked you with the revelation that you were a somnambulist. Four years ago you, of your own accord, separated from her ladyship as much as you could or dared without creating an open scandal. This was one of the most flagrant outrages and most monstrous pieces of injustice that a husband could be guilty of towards a wife. If she had dishonoured you, my lord, you could have done but little beyond:—you could scarcely have punished her more severely; and yet she endured it! Yes—for four years has she endured it; and when under the influence of somnambulism, the instinct of the senses led you to her couch, she abandoned herself to your embraces rather than shock you by startling you into wakefulness, and thus menacing your reason. Now, my lord, I have spoken candidly and frankly: I may have spoken severely too—but it was needful. I have put your own conduct in its proper colours; and you can appreciate to what advantage that of your wife shines by the contrast. But why have I thus spoken? To make you aware of your duty—and through the medium of your duty, to work out your mental cure."

"You need not tell me, my dear Dr. Ferney," interrupted the Earl, alike affected and humiliated, "to take back my wife to my bosom—to surround her with attentions—to lavish all possible kindness upon her: you need not tell me this—because it is the course I intend to adopt. She knows it. Last night, on my knees, did I beseech her forgiveness; and this morning have I renewed that prayer for pardon, accompanied by a solemn promise to make her every possible atonement for the remainder of my life."

"And if you fulfil these pledges, my lord," replied Dr. Ferney, "you will cease to be a somnambulist: but you must exert all your moral power to control the infirmities of your temper and mind. By studying to restrain them in the first instance, you will soon succeed in subjecting them to your dominant will; and ultimately they will die away altogether, leaving your mind in a wholesome state and your imagination healthful. Remember that your wife is but a mortal like yourself: you can now no longer have any doubt of the purity and sincerity of her love—but do not exact from her the necessity of constantly showing it. Study her disposition as she has ever studied your's. There will be mutual forbearance—mutual allowances made; and you will be happy. Surely a man of your intellect——"

"Say no more, Dr. Ferney!" exclaimed the Earl, grasping the physician's hand and pressing it with the enthusiasm of gratitude: "I understand my duties—and I will perform them. Henceforth my only study shall be my dear wife's happiness. Hitherto I have rendered her wretched enough: it shall be different for the future. When she has recovered, Dr. Ferney, you must not cease your visits on that account: you must come to us as a friend, that you may be satisfied your excellent counsel has not been thrown away upon me. You shall witness our felicity; and perhaps this extraordinary episode of domestic life which has thus come to your knowledge, will not be the least memorable of your manifold experiences."

"Ah!" said the physician, shaking his head solemnly, while a deep gloom settled upon his features,—"my experiences, Lord Castlemaine, have indeed been strange—too strange!"

The reader has no difficulty in comprehending that he alluded to all that had come to his knowledge at different times in respect to Lady Saxondale. The Earl of Castlemaine gazed upon him in surprise: for he had never before seen such a cloud gather on the physician's features, nor heard allusions of such mysterious significancy come from his lips. Ferney started up, fearing that in a moment of unconquerable emotion he had said too much; and grasping the Earl's hand, he exclaimed, "Think no more, my lord, of what you have heard. It is my secret!"—and then he added, more slowly and solemnly, "Your lordship perceives that your household is not the only one which barbours its mysteries."

The Earl of Castlemaine was not naturally endowed with curiosity; and he was moreover too much occupied with the circumstances that had so recently transpired beneath his own roof to pay aught beyond a passing attention to the physician's strangeness of looks and words: he accordingly pressed him not for an explanation. Dr. Ferney, hurrying from the room, proceeded to visit his

patient, whom he found so happy in mind that her health was improving hour by hour—minute by minute. The circumstances just referred to, had naturally produced their excitement; but it appeared not to be prejudicial to her ladyship: on the contrary, it seemed, as already stated, to inspire her with new life.

And so it was. At the expiration of a week she was enabled to sit up for several hours in an easy chair: at the end of another week she was strong enough to quit her own suite of apartments and repair to the drawing-room. Need we say that the Earl of Castlemaine kept his word, and proved most kind—most affectionate? or that he preserved the completest control over his temper? Indeed, his cure in this respect appeared to have been thoroughly effected,—as if he only required the strongest and most convincing proofs of his wife's undivided and disinterested love to render him a happy man. His spirits rose: he experienced a gaiety which for years he had not known—a buoyancy of heart that rendered him another being. Thus time wore on: the health of Lady Castlemaine was completely restored—the husband and wife ceased to occupy separate suites of apartments—and the servants of the household were unfeignedly rejoiced to witness a reconciliation which not merely established the felicity of their noble master and mistress on a sure foundation, but which set at rest any suspicions that might have existed with regard to her ladyship's honour.

CHAPTER CXVI.

THE LADY AT THE BALL.

It will be remembered that Lord Petersfield was appointed to undertake, on behalf of the Government, a special mission to Vienna,—and that his ward, Lord Saxondale, was induced by many reasons to accompany him. The mysterious murder of his mistress in Lincolnshire—his dismissal as the suitor of Lady Florina Staunton—his quarrel with Lord Harold—the coldness with which he was regarded by the other young noblemen and gentlemen of his acquaintance—and the satiety wherewith he was clogged in respect to the dissipated pleasures and debauched pursuits of London-life, had all combined to induce Edmund to take that step. He had longed for change of scene; and he knew that the post of attaché to an Ambassador Extraordinary would serve as the passport into the highest and very best society in the Austrian capital. The object of Lord Peterfield's mission was attained with greater promptitude than this nobleman had at first anticipated; and after a residence of about two months in Vienna, the embassy set out on its return to England.

It was in the middle of the month of October that Lord and Lady Petersfield, accompanied by Edmund, and attended by the other persons of their suite, arrived in Paris. Taking up their quarters at one of the most fashionable hotels, they purposed to remain in the French capital for about a week, previously to continuing their journey homeward. Indeed, Lord Petersfield had received private instructions to tarry for this brief space in Paris, in order to confer on certain political matters with the English Ambassador at the French Court; and Edmund who had visited this gay metropolis before, and liked it well, was by no means sorry to have an opportunity of mingling again in its pleasures.

We will not pause to relate how he accompanied Lord and Lady Petersfield to the palace of the Tuileries and was received by the King and Queen of the French—nor how he was included in the invitations to the soirées at the British Ambassador's mansion: but we will proceed to describe a circumstance which led to results of no mean importance to himself.

A grand subscription ball took place at the Odeon Theatre, on behalf of some charity connected with British residents abroad; and all the *elite* of the English aristocracy and gentry, at that time resident in Paris, were present on the occasion. Lord and Lady Petersfield, together with Edmund and some other gentlemen of their suite, repaired to this ball. The pit of the theatre had been boarded over to a level with the stage, so as to constitute a uniform surface of flooring for the dancers: at least a thousand persons, male and female, with every variety of splendid toilet, were assembled there: the orchestra was grand—the theatre was flooded with light—dancing was maintained with great spirit—and the spectacle was alike superb and exhilarating.

During a pause between the quadrilles—and while Lord Saxondale, having conducted his last partner to her seat, was lounging about alone, gazing upon the most beautiful of the fair sex with that half listless, half impudent stare which was partially affected and partially characteristic of the young man—he observed a lady enter, whose appearance he had not before noticed, and who indeed had evidently only just arrived. Her beauty was of that dazzling description which could not fail to strike every beholder, and which made an instantaneous impression upon Edmund Saxondale. She was tall, and most symmetrically shaped,—her figure combining the richness of a Hebe with the gracefulness of a Sylph. Her toilet was elegant, and tastefully adapted to her peculiar style of beauty. Her hair was of that auburn hue which shines bright as gold where the light falls upon it, but seems like dark velvet where the shade remains. It flowed in tresses and ringlets upon shoulders of dazzling whiteness,—one or two stray curls resting upon a bosom of voluptuous fulness. Her eyes were large and of a delicious blue,—not the dark blue of the violet, nor the azure of the heavens,—but of the intermediate hue. They were soft and languishing, and had an expression of sensuousness when the lids were allowed to droop slightly. The forehead was not high—but it was of alabaster fairness: indeed, nothing could exceed the transparent purity and clearness of this lady's complexion. The tint of the rose-bud was upon her cheeks, softening off till imperceptibly blending with the lily fairness of the skin generally. Her nose was slightly, but very slightly, aquiline: the mouth was small—the upper lip curved like Cupid's bow—the lower one fuller, but neither coarse nor pouting. The chin was softly rounded, and completed the oval of a face which would have been of faultless beauty if the forehead were slightly more elevated. Even as it was, it would have been a monstrous fastidiousness of

hypercriticism to cavil at that countenance as a whole, so far as its physical loveliness was concerned: but in respect to its expression, it was—as already hinted—somewhat voluptuous, and appealing as much to the sense as to the sentiment.

A single white camelia adorned the hair of glossy glory and rich luxuriance: two rows of pearls encircled the neck: but not fairer than that neck were those pearls, nor whiter than the teeth which embellished the lady's luxurious mouth. The costliest lace trimmed the short sleeves, and set off to advantage the plump and well-modelled arms of snowy whiteness. From beneath the long skirt of her dress, as she entered the spacious theatre, the well-shaped feet peeped forth; and a glimpse of the rounded ankles might be caught;—while the elegance of her gait and of all her movements denoted that sweeping length of limb which the fancy could depict as completing this ravishing portraiture.

Such was the lady who made her appearance in that brilliant assemblage at a somewhat late hour—indeed, long after the gaieties of the night had commenced. She came alone: no companion, either male or female, escorted her. Her age was about four-and-twenty; and thus, if she were a married woman, expecting to meet friends at the ball whom she might immediately join, there would be but little to remark in the circumstance that she came by herself—unless indeed it would strike any one as singular that a creature of such surpassing loveliness should have found no one in the form of relative or intimate friend to conduct her thither. Edmund Saxondale was so smitten with her appearance, that the moment she crossed the threshold and entered within the sphere of that assemblage whereof she suddenly seemed to become the brightest star, eclipsing all the rest,—he drew near to feast his eyes upon her charms. He noticed that for a moment she appeared to hesitate—that she even stopped short and threw a rapid glance of anxiety around: but this timidity, if such it were, was so transient that as she continued to advance, Edmund thought it might have been mere imagination on his part. At all events the lady immediately recovered her self-possession; and an air of dignity blending with that of elegance and grace which already invested her, she advanced towards a row of chairs in which several ladies were seated, but amongst which there were two or three unoccupied. In one of these vacant chairs the lady sat down,—at the same time inclining her head towards some of the ladies nearest to her, and with whom she thus appeared to be acquainted. They however, without acknowledging her salutation, stared at her in evident amazement; and two or three of them, who were nearest, rising suddenly from their seats, crossed over to the opposite side of the place. This example was promptly followed by the remainder of the ladies in whose vicinage the resplendent new-comer had placed herself; and she was thus in a few minutes left isolated and completely abandoned. The colour forsook her cheeks for a moment—she became deadly pale: but the next instant, appearing to summon all her fortitude to her aid, she flung a look of sovereign contempt across the theatre towards those who had left her thus alone;—and leaning back, she played with her fan with an air of the utmost unconcern.

Edmund Saxondale had observed all these little incidents which we have just related; and he was naturally astonished. He looked around, and perceived that the stranger-lady was the object of universal notice throughout the immense arena. Every eye was directed towards her; and the looks thus concentrated in that one brilliant focus, seemed to express a common feeling of intense surprise. He himself grew more and more bewildered: he could not comprehend what it all meant—for the life of him he could not understand it. That the lady was shunned, was but too evident: but for what reason? Would she have intruded there if she had foreseen what her reception would be? or was it a bold experiment on her part to ascertain how she *would* be received? Were the ladies all jealous of her transcending beauty? and was not this beauty a passport to the compassion of those of the other sex who were present? Such were the questions which Edmund rapidly put to himself: but the last one was answered by the circumstance that no gentleman accosted that lady.

The music struck up again—dancing recommenced—and in the renewed excitement thereof, the lady appeared to be forgotten. Lord Saxondale did not dance this time; and he looked about for some acquaintance to whom he might put an inquiry relative to the object of his curiosity. It however happened that the few individuals who were personally known to him, were all engaged in the quadrilles which had just commenced; and he could not accost them while thus occupied in the dance. He bethought himself of Lord Petersfield, whom he beheld at a distance, conversing with his wonted gravity in the midst of a knot of elderly personages. Hastening to approach his guardian, Edmund caught him by the arm so abruptly that the diplomatist bent upon him a look which had all the sternness of a severe rebuke.

"Just one moment!" said the young nobleman, literally dragging the old one aside with him. "I want you to tell me something——"

"Edmund——Lord Saxondale," said Petersfield, stopping short and looking awfully mysterious and solemn; "I do not understand this—I am at a loss to account for it. Your conduct is so extraordinary—catching me by the arm, as if——as if——I really know not how to find words to convey my sense——"

"My dear Lord Petersfield," interrupted Edmund petulantly, "I want you to tell me something. Who is that lady? do you know her?"

"Really the question is so sudden—so unexpected," answered the wary diplomatist, ever afraid of being caught in some trap or tumbling into some insidious pitfall: "you must excuse me, Edmund—but——"

"But who *is* that lady, my lord? do you happen to know her?" demanded Saxondale impatiently.

"Which lady?" asked Lord Petersfield. "Let me be convinced that I rightly understand whom you mean. Take time to point her out: for I should not like to have you speak in a hurry, more than myself to give a precipitate answer."

"That lady yonder—seated alone there, in the middle of that row of chairs, agitating her fan——"

"Are you sure that it *is* a fan? Don't be too positive, Edmund: appearances are often deceitful'——"

"Do, my lord, tell me, if you know!" interrupted

Saxondale, with increased petulance. "That lady with the magnificent auburn hair——"

"You cannot guarantee that it is her own," observed Petersfield, shaking his head with solemn mystery.

"But you see her? Who is she?"

"Really, Edmund, this question is so home-thrust, that I—I feel myself justified in hesitating even before I answer—which answer I may give in all truth and confidence—that I know nothing at all about her. And to my knowledge——mind, I speak with this proviso, *to my knowledge*—I never saw her before in all my life."

"Why the deuce couldn't you have said so at once?"—and Lord Saxondale broke away from his guardian, who was perfectly confounded by what, in diplomatic terms, he would have denominated the "inconvenience" of so indecorous a remark.

Edmund, perceiving one of the other attachés to the embassy loitering at a little distance, and evidently gazing with mingled interest and admiration upon the beauteous stranger, hastened to accost him,—saying, "Sydney, my dear fellow, do you know who she is?"

"No—I was just thinking of asking some one the question. Isn't it strange that she should be thus left all to herself? We know very well that at these subscription balls almost any one may come: but still it is difficult to conceive that a lady, knowing what sort of a reception she is likely to meet, would voluntarily court such painful treatment as this. Besides, if it were anything very flagrant, the stewards would interfere. I have an uncommon great mind to run all risks and ask her to dance—only I am afraid of offending Petersfield. But I tell you what, Saxondale—if I were you, and independent of the old lord as you are, I wouldn't hesitate a moment. Why don't you go?"

"Well, I will," quickly responded the young nobleman, who only required some such suggestion as this to induce him to follow his inclinations. "But, stop, though! I see that Lord and Lady Petersfield are just going; and I may as well wait till they have taken their departure. They said that they should retire early; and as it happens, I am deuced glad of it."

It was as Edmund said: the old diplomatist and his wife were wending their way together towards the doors; and in a few moments they passed away from the scene of gaiety and splendour.

"Now, Saxondale," said the Hon. Mr. Sydney, principal paid attaché to Lord Petersfield.

"You shall see how nicely I will manage it," answered Edmund.

But he did not observe the ironical smile which appeared upon the lips of Mr. Sydney, who,—though he knew not the lady, nor anything concerning her,—nevertheless saw that there must be something very remarkable about her character for her to be thus shunned: and he was purposely urging Saxondale into a course which would make him appear pre-eminently ridiculous; for the young nobleman was in reality no favourite with the Hon. Mr. Sydney.

Edmund, assuming his most affable look, and walking with an affected mincing gait, approached the isolated lady; and with a very low bow, said, "Madam, shall I have the honour of your hand in the next dance?"

The lady, who had been looking over her fan and saw Lord Saxondale approach, at once raised herself up from the half-reclining and gracefully lounging attitude of seeming *nonchalance* and unconcern in which she had been sitting: and she responded with a smile of the most affable sweetness, "I thank your lordship—but I do not dance for the present. I have only recently recovered from a long and severe illness; and my physician has positively ordered that I do not over-exert myself."

While she thus spoke, she made a slight side-long movement, which seemed to be an invitation for Saxondale to take the chair next to her;—and completely infatuated, as well as dazzled and bewildered by the power of her charms, he unhesitatingly did so. Two things surprised him somewhat. One was that the lady evidently knew who he was—for she had addressed him as "my lord;" and the other was to hear her say that she had recently recovered from a severe illness; for certainly her appearance was very far from corroborating the averment. The hue of health, though of roseate delicacy, was upon her cheeks, which were plump and softly rounded; while the contours of her shape were totally devoid of that emaciation which long indisposition generally leaves behind it.

Those two things surprised him therefore; and there was a third circumstance which he specially noticed. This was, that as she had temporarily taken off the glove of her left hand, he saw that she wore a wedding-ring, and therefore was either a married woman or a widow. But these reflections were hurriedly made: for he found himself so completely under the empire of her charms—so intoxicated by the perfume of beauty, which, as it were, exhaled from her like fragrance from flowers—that he soon had no thought for anything else. He knew not what to say; and yet he scarcely felt awkward while gazing upon her in silence; for the feelings that inspired him were those of ineffable rapture.

"You have not been long in Paris, I believe, Lord Saxondale?" she said, at length breaking the silence; and her voice was clear and harmonious as a silver bell.

"Only a week, on the present occasion," he answered: "and it was my intention to leave to-morrow. But——"

"I understand your lordship," observed the lady, with another bewitching smile: "this Paris of our's has so many charms and fascinations, that you cannot readily tear yourself away from them?"

"You say this Paris of *your's*," remarked Saxondale, with a renewed feeling of surprise: "surely I have the honour of speaking to an English lady?"

"English by birth—but naturalized a French-woman by marriage," she rejoined.

"Your husband is not here this evening?" observed Edmund inquiringly.

"My husband——is dead," returned the lady: and her face was bent downward with a sudden expression of profound mournfulness, which to Saxondale's eyes was but a new and more touching phase in which her beauty displayed itself.

"Pardon me, madam," he said, with an inward feeling of delight—though he scarcely knew why—to learn that she was a widow: "I did not intend to recall painful recollections."

"You must suppose, my lord, that my husband's

death was not a very recent occurrence—or else I should not be here, nor attired thus:"—and her exquisite blue eyes glanced quickly over her toilet. "I am therefore resigned to that loss which was at first a terrible blow to me. The Baron de Charlemont died two years ago. You are perhaps aware that he was a General of the Empire; and therefore," she added, gently and hesitatingly, "many years older than myself."

Saxondale had thus at length learnt who she was. He was talking to the Baroness de Charlemont—a lady of rank and title—most probably of fortune, considering the high position of her late husband. But he did not now pause to ask himself, nor even to throw out a hint of inquiry, how it was that she had been thus shunned, and that her presence had excited such a sensation of amazement in that assemblage? He had altogether forgotten the circumstance: he was under the spell of a loveliness which threw into the shade all the impressions which the beauty of either Florina Staunton or Emily Archer had ever made upon him. Nor did he notice that Mr. Sydney was surveying him with a mischievous look from a distance—or that his *tete-a-tete* with this lady had become an object of mingled wonderment and disgust on the part of all who were near enough to observe it. Heads were shaken ominously—strange mysterious looks were exchanged—and whispered observations were made. But nothing of all this did Edmund notice: he felt as much alone with the Baroness de Charlemont as if they were in reality altogether so. But she on her part could not help flinging an occasional look of exultant triumph towards those whose gaze was thus bent upon the spot where she was seated with her noble companion.

"I feel faint and ill," she suddenly observed, while her looks grew simultaneously languid. "I must retire——"

"Permit me to escort you hence?" Saxondale hastened to observe. "Have you a vehicle—— or——"

"My carriage is in attendance," she replied, at the same time accepting his proffered arm.

They walked out from the theatre together, followed by the eyes of the entire assemblage. A lady's-maid, who had been waiting in the shawl-room, hurried out the moment she caught sight of her mistress, whom she assisted to put on an elegant satin cloak, with a hood to draw partially over the head. Saxondale then conducted the Baroness down the staircase; and the cry of "Madame de Charlemont's carriage!" resounded through the air. A splendid equipage dashed up to the entrance of the theatre: Edmund handed the Baroness in—and then stood hesitating for a moment in what terms to proffer a request that he might be permitted to call upon her on the following day.

"Your lordship will sup with me," she said, with one of those bewitching smiles which had already made such havoc upon his heart: and all the fascinating sweetness of her countenance, as she thus spoke, was revealed by the strong glare which the lamps in the front of the theatre threw into the carriage.

"With pleasure," responded Saxondale to the invitation so enchantingly given: and the next moment he was seated by her side in the vehicle.

The lady's-maid entered also—the footman, who as well as the coachman was dressed in gorgeous livery, closed the door—and the equipage drove rapidly away.

CHAPTER CXVII.

THE BARONESS DE CHARLEMONT.

THE ride was not long: for the vehicle soon drove into the court-yard of a handsome house in the Rue de Tournon, near the palace of the Luxembourg. The footman opened the door: Edmund alighted, and then assisted his fair companion to descend. She took his arm, and led the way up a spacious well-lighted staircase, to a superbly furnished drawing-room. Requesting him to be seated, she said that she would be with him again in a few minutes—and retired in the company of her maid.

Lord Saxondale had now, for the first time since he accosted the Baroness de Charlemont at the theatre, a little leisure to reflect upon the adventure into which he had thus so precipitately plunged. He looked around, and perceived that the room was elegantly appointed: the furniture was rich and costly: in short, everything connected with the Baroness—her equipage—her domestics—her mansion—all appeared to denote the possession of ample means. That she was miraculously beautiful, was a truth which the impression made upon his heart, fully proclaimed. How was it, then, that with rank, wealth, and loveliness, she should have been so treated at the ball? It could scarcely be that her character was notoriously vile and depraved; because if so, the stewards of that ball would have certainly taken measures to convey to her an intimation that her presence was regarded as a general insult. They had done nothing of the sort: and yet had he seen her, not merely neglected, but absolutely shunned and avoided. It was a strange mystery; and Edmund could not form the slightest conjecture towards its unravelment. Passing away from that topic, his thoughts settled themselves completely upon the exceeding charms of her person. Never, he fancied to himself, had he beholden so splendid a creature in female shape. And she seemed perfectly modest and well-behaved likewise: her manners were not only those of a polished lady—but there was the fullest propriety investing them: for if her smiles had been fraught with such ravishing effects, she was not to be blamed for their magic power; and in bestowing those smiles, in harmony as it were with her discourse, there was nothing forward, bold, nor immodest.

While Saxondale was thus absorbed in his raptured reverie, the Baroness returned to the apartment. She had made no change in her toilet, beyond laying aside the cloak, her gloves, and her fan; and as she entered, Saxondale, rising out of respect, was again completely dazzled and bewildered by the glory of her beauty. She requested him to resume his seat; and placing herself near him, she said, "I now take the opportunity, my lord, to thank you for an act of generosity which you performed this evening, and to which I did not choose to make pointed allusion until a fitting opportunity. A few words of explanation may be necessary. I regret to say that *your* countrywomen—for naturalized on the French soil as I am, I can

no longer call them *mine*—are devoured with jealousy because nature has happened to render me not very ill-looking. As for the gentlemen, both married and single have persecuted me with their addresses—the former, as a matter of course, being anything but honourable: for such is too often the custom in this dissipated city of Paris. It is supposed that a young widow must either take another husband, or else a lover: I have had offers of both kinds—I have refused them all—the former with a respectful gratitude, the latter with indignation. But my conduct has made me enemies; and the result has been the treatment which, as you saw, I experienced to-night. Now my resolve is taken: I shall leave Paris to-morrow—and for ever!"

"But whither will you go?" inquired Saxondale, who in his infatuation gave the most implicit credence to every syllable of the Baroness de Charlemont's long speech; and no wonder—for it was accompanied with so much tender pathos, alike of looks and accents, that it rivetted the impression which the brilliancy of her beauty had already made upon his heart. "Whither will you go?" he repeated, in a voice which implied that wheresoever she might proceed, thither was he resolved to repair likewise.

"I shall return to the capital of my own native land," she answered: "I shall go to London. If I had any relatives yet living, either on my own or my husband's side, I should not be without the escort of suitable companionship: but I have none—and I must go alone!"

"No—not alone!" ejaculated Edmund. "Permit me to be that escort which you seem to desire?"

The Baroness bent upon Saxondale a look beaming with gratitude: but ere she could give any reply, the footman entered to announce that supper was served up. Edmund proffered his arm: she took it—and they followed the domestic to an adjacent apartment. It was a smaller one than the drawing-room—most luxuriously furnished—and where an exquisite supper was spread upon the table. There was champagne in ice, together with other choice wines; and on the sideboard appeared a dessert of delicious autumnal fruits. The Baroness motioned the domestic to retire—a proceeding quite consistent with the fashion of little Parisian suppers of this description.

Lord Saxondale placed himself at table with his beautiful hostess; and as he drank glass after glass of the exhilarating champagne, the fumes of the wine added to the intoxicating influence of her transcending loveliness. He felt that he could make any sacrifice, if need were, to possess so splendid a creature either as mistress or wife: he was already profoundly in love—if love it might be called which such a heart as his could experience, and which was excited through the medium of the sense and not of the sentiment. It never occurred to him that he himself, being no Adonis, could not possibly have captivated the heart of this lady so suddenly and completely as she had ensnared his own: his natural vanity would not permit him to make such a reflection; and therefore he flattered himself that the increasing tenderness of her looks and the growing friendliness of her manner, were indicative of the same passion on her part as that which he felt.

"And you have decided," he said, "upon taking your departure to-morrow?"

"Yes—beyond all doubt," responded the Baroness. "I can endure this Paris no longer."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?" he quickly exclaimed.

"Have you no one whose consent you must ask?" she inquired. "Is not Lord Petersfield your guardian? and must you not, in consequence of the post you hold in his embassy, abide by his will, even apart from that species of parental power which he wields over you?"

"Nothing of the kind!" ejaculated Edmund: "it was by my own free consent that I accompanied him on his mission;—indeed, the proposal emanated direct from myself. As for his guardianship, I am fully and completely my own master, in consequence of a certain compact with my mother."

"Your mother, then," observed the Baroness, as if quite in a conversational manner, "has no influence over your proceedings?"

"None—none whatsoever! I should think not indeed!" cried Edmund: and he helped himself to another glass of champagne.

"But you are not yet of age?"

"No—not yet. Nevertheless I can do just as I choose: and what is more, I intend to do so. So your ladyship sees that I am completely my own master: and how can I better dispose of my time, than in escorting you to London? You must not travel alone. Only think of the inconveniences!—and believe me when I assure you that it would afford me such pleasure to be your escort——"

"But how singular it will seem!" exclaimed the Baroness, with an arch smile. "A young nobleman such as you, to accompany a young widow as I am! The world will point to us—the tongue of scandal will be busy——No, my lord," she added, suddenly becoming serious; "it cannot be. Do not misunderstand me. It was through gratitude that I invited you to my home: and moreover, the usages of Parisian society do not stamp with indiscretion such a proceeding. A married lady or a widow may entertain a friend thus; and it *is* as a friend that I regard you—for circumstances suddenly placed us in that light——at least, if you will permit me to say so."

"A friend!" exclaimed Saxondale. "Would to heaven that I were something more to you than that! Friendship is so cold a term——"

"But the only one that can be used by persons who have known each other for only a few hours. Now, with regard to this journey of mine," continued the Baroness, "your lordship must understand full well that you could accompany me only in the position of a lover—to be explicit, I must rather say as a paramour—or else as one destined to be my husband. Not for a moment can the former be dreamt of! I value my reputation—and I have my own womanly pride. No—never will I peril that reputation by any indiscretion on my part: much less could I consent to step down from the pedestal on which I have hitherto maintained my stand. No, my lord—you cannot accompany me: you see that it is impossible."

"Say not the word *impossible!*" exclaimed Saxondale, more than half intoxicated with wine and love: then falling at the feet of the Baroness de Charlemont, he took her hand; and pressing it to his lips,

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cried, "Let it be as your intended husband that I shall accompany you! Yes—let it be in that light! I already know you as well and love you as much as if our acquaintance had been that of years instead of hours. I entreat you——"

"My lord, rise—I beseech you, rise!" said the Baroness, appearing to be profoundly agitated; and she did not withdraw the hand which Saxondale continued to press rapturously to his lips.

He did rise: and he stood by her side, as she remained seated. She looked up into his countenance with eyes that seemed full of tenderness: and he observed that her bosom was swelling and heaving as if with the tumult of the feelings that worked within. The rose upon her cheeks had deepened into carnation: there was a moisture upon her lips that made them seem richer and more luscious than was even their natural wont: her whole appearance breathed a softly sensuous languor. Saxondale's passions were excited almost to madness. Had Satan stood by his side and demanded the eventual transfer of his soul, in recompense for handing over to him the possession of this enchanting woman, he would have greedily assented to the compact. The perfume of her beauty appeared to arise around him like the overpowering fragrance of flowers. The light streaming from the chandelier suspended to the ceiling, shed its lustre upon her head, making her hair shine like a veil of burnished gold floating down upon her polished shoulders and over her back: her complexion, save where the carnation hues were upon the cheeks, was white and pure as the lily, and exquisitely diaphanous. Upon her brow was the delicate tracery of blue veins, seen through that pellucid skin. One hand, which hung drooping over the arm of the chair, seemed to be drinking into its pores of pearl the light that flooded the room: the other hand, which Saxondale held in his own, felt warm and tremulous in his clasp.

More than a minute elapsed while she sat thus looking up at him with that softly voluptuous expression,—and while he stood gazing down upon her, devouring with his regards that splendid countenance, and suffering his wanton imagination to complete the rounded forms of the bust whereof somewhat was exposed to the view. Yes—he could have sacrificed his very soul to possess this woman, so great was the empire which her charms had obtained over him in the short space of two or three hours.

"You have made me a proposal," she said, in a subdued and tremulous voice, "which, were I a young creature of six or eight years less than I am, and feeling towards you what I do, I should perhaps at once accept. But I do not thus precipitately bind you to a compact which you may perhaps repent to-morrow."

"Repent? No—never, never!" exclaimed Saxondale: and again he fell upon his knees at her feet. "Have I not told you that I am my own master? Hear me, then, while I solemnly avow my affection towards you!—hear me while I proclaim once more that I already love you as if we had known each other for years! I offer to make you the sharer of my rank, and the partner of my fortune when on coming of age I shall inherit it. If upon these conditions you will suffer me to accompany you to London, where we can be united—or if to-morrow you will bestow upon me your hand, so that I may at once acquire a legal and moral right to be the companion of your journey, and to remain with you for ever henceforth—be it so! It is for you to decide: but keep me not in suspense!"

"What can I say to you? how can I resist these entreaties, so vehement—so passionate?" murmured the Baroness de Charlemont: and bending forward, she drooped her blushing countenance upon the shoulder of him who was still kneeling at her feet.

Edmund threw his arms about her neck, and strained her in his embrace. He covered her cheeks with kisses: they were warm and glowing, those softly rounded cheeks;—and from her lips, too, did he cull the most exquisite sweets.

"Rise, Edmund—rise," she said, after a few moments of this amorous play: "rise, I entreat you! —the domestics may enter! But if you await my decision, have it——I will become your wife."

Again he pressed her in his arms: he would have grown bolder than the mere taking of those warm kisses—but she gently though firmly disengaged herself from his embrace; and compelling him to resume his seat, she said, "But to-morrow, perhaps, you will repent of this offer you have made? you will look back with regret on what may appear the folly of your conduct? Friends may advise you——"

"No—I shall consult them not," interrupted Edmund vehemently. "Do you think that where my happiness is at stake, I am not the best judge of how to ensure it? Besides," he added, "when I return to the hotel presently, I shall see no one to annoy or trouble me with questions; and in the morning I will rise very early—order my valet to pack up my things—and come hither at once straight to you. May I be permitted to regard this arrangement as settled?"

"Yes—if you wish it to be so," responded the Baroness, with downcast eyes and blushing countenance: then after a pause, she went on to observe, "But our hands cannot be united here in Paris: nor indeed anywhere in France. I am a Protestant—as I believe you are; and nowhere save at the chapel of the British Embassy can a legal ceremony be solemnized between us in this country. There, as you are known, you might meet with obstructions. We will without delay proceed to London——"

"And *there* can our hands be united at once!" ejaculated Edmund, enraptured at the idea of possessing that splendid woman as his wife.

"To-morrow morning, therefore," she resumed, "will I have a travelling-carriage in readiness at eight o'clock. You will be here to breakfast with me soon after seven. Your own valet and my maid will alone accompany us. I shall leave a letter for my notary, directing him to dispose of my furniture and my equipages—dismiss my servants—and let my mansion. For believe me, dear Edmund, it will never be my wish to return to this Paris, of the heartlessness and the depravity of whose fashionable sphere I am thoroughly sickened."

"You will do well to make up your mind thus," responded the infatuated young nobleman: "for when once my wife, you will become mistress of a mansion in London, as well as of a castle in Lincolnshire; and proud shall I be to place you at the head of those establishments."

"But your mother, Edmund—and I believe you have sisters too——"

"What of them?" he ejaculated. "One of my sisters is married to a French nobleman; and they are at Madrid. My mother and my eldest sister are at present staying in France—I don't exactly know where. I was at Vienna when they left England: but from letters that I received, there seems to have been some precious scene at the castle in Lincolnshire, the rights of which I have not exactly learnt. However, it's very certain that neither my mother nor sisters are in England now; and even if they were, it would not be of any consequence—for I know a secret or two about my mother that would prevent her from daring to interfere with my proceedings."

"You must understand, Edmund," said the Baroness de Charlemont, "that if I so often allude apprehensively to Lady Saxondale, it is because I should be sorry indeed to lead you into open rebellion against her. Not, however," she added proudly, "but that the widow of a General of the Empire and a Peer of France may well aspire to an alliance with the heir of Saxondale. It is the discrepancy of our ages—and the suddenness of the attachment which you have formed—that might be regarded as objections. But after the assurances you have given me, that you are so entirely your own master, I will say nothing more upon the subject. There is however one thing I have to mention——and pardon me, my dear Edmund, if I touch upon so delicate a topic. I know that young men are often extravagant, and that they go beyond the means allowed by their parents or guardians. If you have any little liabilities to settle before you leave Paris, and for which you reckoned upon the purse of Lord Petersfield, do not hesitate to make me your banker. I have in this writing-desk a quantity of notes and gold——You must not be offended at what I am saying: inasmuch," she added, again with blushing cheeks, "as in a few days everything we mutually possess will be thrown into a common stock."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks," exclaimed Saxondale, "for this proof of confidence and love on your part: but fortunately I require no assistance—I have ample funds at my own disposal."

The Baroness de Charlemont, who had risen from her seat as she spoke and was proceeding to unlock her writing-desk, turned towards Edmund, and said with the sweetest of all sweet smiles, "You are sure that your calculation is correct and that you require nothing?"

"Nothing now but another kiss from those dear lips!"—and rising also from his seat, he threw his arms about the lady's neck and strained her once more to his breast.

Five minutes afterwards he was retracing his way in a street-vehicle to the hotel where he lodged; and during the half-hour's drive thither he continued to dwell with rapture upon the image of the beautiful Baroness de Charlemont. On reaching the hotel, he was about to hurry up to his own chamber,—when his valet informed him that Lord Petersfield, who had remained sitting up for his return, desired most particularly to see him before he retired to rest. Edmund, excited with wine, and infatuated in his purpose of adhering to all his promises to the Baroness de Charlemont, was at first half inclined to disobey Lord Petersfield's request: for he had little doubt that it was with regard to this lady his lordship meant to speak to him. But a second thought made him resolve to see his guardian, the better to avert suspicion from his plan of rising early and quitting the hotel by stealth. He accordingly proceeded to the apartment where Lord Petersfield had been passing the time in the study of certain diplomatic papers the contents of which he already had at his finger's ends.

"This is a pretty hour for you to come in, Lord Saxondale," began Petersfield, drawing himself up with an air of awful solemnity as he slowly drew forth his watch. "It is one in the morning; and you know that we have to take our departure—I will not say *to-morrow*, because the morrow is already entered upon—or at least the morning——"

"And so much the greater reason, my lord," returned Edmund, "why you and I should toddle up to our bed-rooms."

"What?" said Lord Petersfield, perfectly aghast, "did you use the word *toddle*?—toddle to me! her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary to the Imperial Court of Vienna!——toddle to me, a Peer of the realm! Pray, Lord Saxondale, do I look like a person who is accustomed to toddle? Don't answer precipitately—take time to reflect. I should not like to speak unadvisedly: but I do not mind for once in a way hazarding a conjecture—which is that *you*, Lord Saxondale, are inebriated."

"I drunk!" cried the young nobleman. "I am as sober as a judge——never more sober in my life. But come—why did you want to see me?"

"It was fortunate, Lord Saxondale," resumed Petersfield, "that on coming back from the ball, I had occasion to sit up and peruse some of these documents——I say *fortunate*, inasmuch as it put me in the way of learning, on Mr. Sydney's return, that you had positively and actually—though I should not say so of my own knowledge—but were it a written deposition, I should put it in this light, that 'the undersigned has learnt with great sorrow and regret that Lord Saxondale, contrary to all conventional usages——'"

"Pray, my lord, do come to the point at once," interrupted Edmund. "I am getting as sleepy as any owl. And you," he added, in an under-tone, "are certainly as stupid as one."

"An owl, Edmund? an owl, Lord Saxondale? Did you say an owl?"—and Petersfield, who had caught the young nobleman's words, now looked positively awful. "Do you think that her Majesty's Government would send an owl to transact its business? Don't answer in a hurry—but tell me, having weighed the question well, whether I look like an owl?"

"Most uncommonly!" ejaculated Edmund, in a thorough pet: and he flung himself out of the room, leaving the door wide open: then rushing up to his own chamber, he locked himself in with his valet.

To this individual, in whom he knew that he could fully confide, he communicated his plan of leaving the hotel a little before seven o'clock,—without however entering into much farther explanation. The domestic hastily began packing up his young master's effects; and in less than half-an-hour these preparations were completed. The valet then retired to his own room; and Saxondale fell

into a sound sleep, to dream of the splendid Baroness de Charlemont.

Meanwhile Lord Petersfield had ascended to the chamber where his wife was already wrapped in the arms of slumber; and a very awful aspect had the ancient diplomatist—for though pretty well accustomed to his ward's freaks and humours, yet he felt that he never could forgive his having called him—yes, *him*, her Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary—an owl! The reader has of course understood that Lord Petersfield had intended to take Saxondale to task for his conduct in respect to the Baroness de Charlemont: but the castigation, as well as whatsoever explanations might have accompanied it, were altogether cut short by Edmund's abrupt departure from the room.

A little before seven o'clock the faithful valet tapped gently at the door of his young master's chamber: but Edmund was already up and nearly dressed. The hotel-porter was in readiness to convey the trunks down stairs—a hackney-coach was summoned—and Lord Saxondale effected his escape without the cognizance of his guardian. In half-an-hour he alighted at the mansion of the Baroness de Charlemont in the Rue de Tournon—and was at once conducted to an apartment, where an excellent breakfast was spread upon the table. The Baroness soon made her appearance: Edmund flew towards her and caught her in his arms,—she rapturously returning his embrace.

She was dressed for travelling. Her hair, which on the previous night she had worn in such luxuriant curls and tresses, was now gathered up in massive bands,—resting like dark gold on either side of her ivory forehead. She appeared to equal advantage in the day-time as in the evening when surrounded by a flood of lustre: for nothing could exceed the fairness of her skin, nor the purity of the roseate tint upon her cheeks. Her balmy breath, respired between the bright red lips, seemed like a zephyr gathering sweets from the roses amidst which it passed; and in her looks there was the animation of happiness, blended with that soft sensuous languor which habitually characterized them. The dress that she now wore ascended to her throat, and fitted tight to the shape,—thus developing to even greater advantage than the evening toilet, the admirable symmetry and rich contours of her shape. The morning's reflection had in no way diminished the infatuation which her charms had inspired on the previous evening in respect to Saxondale: but even if such were the case, all the ardour of his passion would have been excited anew on beholding the Baroness as she now appeared. He thought, as his arm encircled her waist, and he felt the heaving of her superb bust against his chest—and as he culled kiss after kiss from her moist red lips —and beheld pleasure dancing softly and sensuously in the blue depths of her large swimming eyes,—that he was indeed fortunate in possessing the love of such a woman, and of having the prospect in a short time to present her to the world as his wife.

The repast was soon finished: for he was in a hurry to commence the journey - and she appeared to have no wish for delay. A travelling-carriage was in readiness soon after eight: he and the Baroness seated themselves side by side in the interior, the maid with them—his valet occupied the box—the postilions cracked their whips—and the equipage rolled out of the court-yard of the mansion in the Rue de Tournon.

Meanwhile Edmund's stealthy departure from the hotel, in company with his valet, was communicated to Lord Petersfield. This nobleman, at once suspecting (in consequence of all he had heard from Mr. Sydney on the previous night) that his ward was ensnared by the Baroness de Charlemont, sent that gentleman and another *attaché* to the mansion in the Rue de Tournon, in order to obtain an immediate interview with Edmund, and make him a certain communication, which it was hoped would at once put an end to the newly-formed connexion. But the *attachés* arrived a quarter of an hour too late: Edmund and the Baroness were gone.

CHAPTER CXVIII.

THE INN AT BEAUVAIS.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, that the travelling-carriage rolled into the town of Beauvais, and stopped at the principal hotel, where it was purposed to take some refreshment. The Baroness, attended by her maid, ascended to a chamber that she might make some change in her toilet—for the October evening threatened to set in cold. In the meantime, Lord Saxondale, being shown to a private sitting-room, gave the requisite orders for the prompt serving up of a repast. When the waiter, to whom his instructions were issued, had retired, Edmund lounged towards the window, which looked upon the court-yard of the hotel: but scarcely had he approached the casement, when he was struck with surprise on beholding Lord Harold Staunton issue from a doorway in the range of buildings on the opposite side. Harold was smoking a cigar; and by the manner in which he began to loiter negligently about, was evidently stopping at the hotel. Happening to raise his eyes, he caught sight of Saxondale, and appeared equally astonished to behold him there. For a few moments no farther sign of recognition took place between them: but Staunton, probably thinking that the origin of their quarrel at Emily Archer's villa was foolish enough—or else being anxious to renew his intimacy with Edmund—at length gave him a familiar nod, accompanied with a smile which plainly intimated his wish to be on good terms.

Edmund, on the other hand, had his own reasons for desiring to converse with Staunton. He had learnt, when at Vienna, a few meagre details of the incidents which had taken place at Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire; and he was naturally curious to know more. Accordingly, in response to that nod which Lord Harold had given him, he made a sign to the effect that he would come down and join him in the court-yard of the hotel: and thither he at once repaired.

"Well, Saxondale," Staunton immediately exclaimed, as he extended his hand, "I suppose there is no farther ill-will between us?"

"Not a bit!" answered Edmund: and they shook hands accordingly. "But what the deuce has brought you hither?"

"Rather," rejoined Staunton, "let me ask what you are doing here? I thought you were with Lord Petersfield in Vienna."

"The embassy is on its way home—Petersfield is in Paris—or rather, I believe he also must have left this morning: for we have parted company."

"And you are on your way to England, I suppose?" said Lord Harold. "I am stopping here for a day or two: I rather took a fancy to the place—there is some good partridge-shooting in the neighbourhood—and as I have nothing better to do, I thought I would kill time a little at Beauvais."

"Do tell me, Harold," said Lord Saxondale, drawing his friend a little further up the court-yard, "all about those affairs that took place at the castle some six or seven weeks back."

"What! are you not thoroughly acquainted with them? is it possible you have not heard everything?"

"I only learnt this much," replied Edmund—"that you were going to marry my mother, and a certain Mr. Hawkshaw was to marry Juliana—but that the Marquis of Eagledean, who had suddenly arrived from Italy, came at the very nick of time, and took you away; and that Hawkshaw learnt something which induced him to break off the match with Juliana. That is all I know."

"And this *something* in respect to your sister," said Lord Harold, eyeing Edmund in a peculiar manner,—"do you really mean to tell me——"

"That I know nothing about it. Upon my honour I do not; and I wish you would tell me. I dare say," continued Edmund, in his wonted flippant manner, "that she flirted with somebody else—or some such nonsense of that kind."

"Flirted indeed!" echoed Staunton: "she had done something more than flirt. The exposure was terrific: I never saw anything like it. Why, my dear Edmund, your sister is in the family-way."

"The deuce?" ejaculated the young nobleman. "But Hawkshaw——"

"No—not by him: and this part of the secret I don't know myself. But true enough it was—and Juliana did not deny it."

"But in respect to yourself, Harold?—I was perfectly astounded when I first learnt that you intended to marry my mother; and then I laughed heartily at the idea of one with whom I had had so many gay frolics, becoming my father-in-law. What a nice father-in-law you would have made! But was it true that your old uncle arrived suddenly?"

"Suddenly indeed! He had been in England for some time. Would you believe it?—that Mr. Gunthorpe and the Marquis of Eagledean were one and the same person."

For a few moments Edmund looked astounded: and then bursting out into a fit of laughter, he said, "I suppose he had not forgotten the fun we had with him in Jermyn Street—and how nicely we did him out of those five thousand pounds? But has he sent you to travel for the benefit of your health, that we thus meet upon the Continent?"

"That is precisely what he has done," responded Harold. "He ordered me to come abroad with a moderate allowance—on probation for a year; and if I behave well and don't run into debt, or get into any scrapes, he will make me a handsome allowance. So you see," added Staunton, with an ironical smile, "I am on my best behaviour. I have been at Bruges in Belgium for some weeks past for the Marquis sent me abroad immediately after that affair at Saxondale Castle. Bruges is a precious dull place; and so I went to Boulogne the other day: but liking that still less, I thought I would come on by short stages to Paris. And here you find me on my way thither."

"And do you really intend to turn over a new leaf and be steady?" inquired Saxondale, with a mischievous smile.

"I don't know what the devil to do," responded Staunton. "I feel like a wandering spirit. You see, I am completely dependent on my uncle; and I must at all events try to be as steady as possible—for I have no doubt he will watch me from a distance. Would you believe it?—that scoundrel Alfred——"

"Your valet? I thought he was such a good fellow—such a prize—such a valuable domestic."

"The villain! he was a spy upon my actions—he told my uncle everything."

"Indeed! I should not have thought he could have proved so treacherous. Of course he is not with you any longer?"

"Oh, no—my uncle rewarded him, and he is gone into another situation. But I have something more to tell you: this uncle of mine has recently married."

"Married!" exclaimed Saxondale. "What? to cut you out of the title and estates."

"I hope and trust that such will not be the case," answered Staunton, a shade coming over his countenance. "I could endure anything but *that*. But is it possible that you are so ignorant of all the things that have taken place?——have you not heard from your mother or sister?"

"Not a line—not a syllable. They are not likely to write to me. The little I heard about the affairs down in Lincolnshire, was from Lord Petersfield, who had a letter from Malton; and his lordship, you know, is not over communicative upon any subject. But what more have you to tell me?"

"That young Francis Paton——"

"Ah! the page that my mother once had at Saxondale House?"

"The very same. He is none other than my uncle's son: illegitimate of course—or else it would be at once a blow to my hopes. And there is a daughter too——"

"These *are* wonders! Pray whom," inquired Saxondale, "has your uncle married?"

"The mother of his two illegitimate children—Lady Everton that was."

"And now, tell me wherefore this uncle of your's should have been so terribly averse to your marriage with my mother?"

"I think, Edmund," answered Lord Harold Staunton, his countenance becoming serious, "that this is really too delicate a point for me to touch upon with Lady Saxondale's son. But by the bye, do you happen to know where your mother and sister are?—for I believe that they left England immediately after the events in Lincolnshire—and it was rumoured they went to take up their abode at some out of the way place in Ireland."

"Very far from it," responded Saxondale: "for they are somewhere in France—but where I cannot say. All I know is, that Malton told Lord Petersfield so in the letter of which I have already spoken."

"In France?" ejaculated Staunton: then in an

under-tone, he said to himself, "I think if my uncle had known this, he would not have sent me to travel on the Continent, for fear I might fall in with Lady Saxondale, and marry her yet. But there is no fear of that!"—and the young nobleman's countenance again darkened into sinister gloom.

"What are you muttering to yourself?" inquired Edmund.

"Nothing—nothing," quickly responded Staunton. "But now tell me about yourself. Are you in a hurry to get back to England? Can't you, for old acquaintance' sake, remain here a day or two and bear me company?"

"Impossible! The truth is," continued Edmund, with a very mysterious look and in a confidential manner, "I am travelling with a lady——Ah! my dear Harold, such a conquest I have made! Never in all your life have you seen such a splendid creature! Forgive me for saying that she is much handsomer than your sister Florina——And by the bye, now I understand how it was that that meddling old humbug Gunthorpe, as I supposed him to be—but the Marquis of Eagledean as you tell me he really is—broke off that match between Florina and me."

"And do you know, Edmund," said Lord Harold, "on whom my uncle purposes to bestow Florina's hand? On that very William Deveril——"

"With whom you had the duel—the painter on ivory—and to whom my mother took such a fancy! Is it possible? And I was jilted by Florina for such a fellow as that! and your uncle preferred a beggarly artist instead of a young nobleman like me, with rank and fortune, and who traces his descent from the Tudors!"

"A descent from the Tudors is perhaps a very fine thing, Edmund," responded Harold, with a half-subdued ironical smile; "but it is not the less a fact that my uncle prefers the ivory-painter as a husband for his niece: and what is more, my aunt Lady Macdonald appears to be of the same way of thinking. But about this lady of your's? Do you mean that it is a conquest in the shape of a mistress——"

"No—Oh no! She is a paragon of virtue—a very phœnix of perfection——"

"And yet you tell me that you are travelling with this paragon and phœnix," observed Lord Harold. "I presume therefore that she has her parents with her?"

"No: her parents are dead—she has no relations, either to protect her or interfere with her—she is a widow. But of course she has her maid with her—and I have my valet; and therefore it is all respectable and straightforward enough."

"And you intend to marry her?" observed Harold interrogatively, his haughtily handsome lip at the same time slightly wreathing with a sneer.

"Of course I do!" exclaimed Edmund; "and I consider myself the happiest of men. I tell you again, Staunton, that in loveliness of person she is unrivalled. Poor Emily Archer was nothing to her. Ah! you may well look queer when I mention the name——"

"How, queer? what do you mean?" demanded Harold, with a sudden start: and the expression of his countenance was certainly very peculiar at the moment.

"Now don't annoy yourself in respect to the past, my dear Staunton," replied Saxondale. "I was not going to reproach you for that little business which took place at Evergreen Villa, when I found you concealed in poor Emily's bed-chamber——Wasn't it a shocking thing that she should have met her death in such a way? But by the bye, now that I recollect, you were in Lincolnshire at the time—you were staying at the Castle. Did suspicion light upon any persons in particular? I fancy not, from what I read in the papers."

"I knew but little about it," answered Harold, turning half aside to knock the long ash off his cigar. "The fact is, I was confined to my bed at the time by a very severe and dangerous fall I had from a horse—one of Hawkshaw's horses, too. But to return once more to this lady of your's——I am not indiscreet enough to propose to thrust myself upon your privacy——"

"No—it wouldn't do," quickly rejoined Edmund. "You see, we have not known each other long; and so it is natural we should like to be together as much as possible—and she has conceived such a passionate fondness towards me——"

"Oh! quite natural, no doubt!" ejaculated Lord Harold, with another half-repressed sneer, but which Edmund still failed to perceive. "I repeat that I do not seek to force myself upon you. I am only asking about the lady on account of old friendship with you and through passing curiosity. I hope it will be a good match for your sake;—and knowing what an experienced fellow you are in the ways of the world, I have no doubt you are taking good care of yourself in the matter."

"Yes—I believe that I am tolerably wide awake," observed Edmund, complacently stroking his beardless chin. "A person must get up rather early in the morning to take me in. But of course it is improper to a degree, as well as ridiculous, to speak thus in respect to a lady of rank, distinction, and fortune—the widow of a General in the French army and a Peer of France."

"Ah! then your phœnix and paragon is a French lady?" observed Harold.

"No—she is an English lady; but she married the French General—and he died a couple of years ago."

"Well, it does look a straightforward affair," said Harold. "But would it be indiscreet to inquire her ladyship's name?"

"The Baroness de Charlemont," rejoined Saxondale.

"The Baroness de Charlemont?" echoed Staunton in amazement: but Edmund fancied it to be in admiration of the euphonious grandeur of the title.

At this moment the waiter accosted him, with a hasty announcement that dinner was served up, and that his presence was awaited. He accordingly ejaculated forth a hurried "Farewell" to Lord Harold; and broke away from him, as the latter attempted to detain him.

"Well, let the silly fool have his own way," muttered Staunton to himself: and lounging up the court-yard, he continued whiffing his cigar.

Half-an-hour afterwards he saw Lord Saxondale hand the Baroness de Charlemont into the carriage: but not choosing to exhibit any curiosity to obtain a nearer view of the lady—whom indeed he had never before seen, but only heard of—he continued at a distance. The vehicle rolled out of

the establishment: and the sounds of its wheels as well as the cracking of the postilions' whips soon ceased to meet his ears.

It was now past four o'clock; and Staunton did not dine till six. Time hung somewhat heavily on his hands; and he accordingly lighted another cigar, with the intention of strolling through the town to while away an hour or so. But just as he was issuing forth from the gateway of the hotel, a post-chaise drove up and began to turn into the court-yard. Lord Harold, perceiving two ladies inside, lingered with the idle curiosity of a young man to catch a glimpse of their countenances,—when to his surprise he at once recognized Lady Saxondale and Juliana. They did not observe him; and immediately alighting from the carriage, they entered the hotel, where they were shown to private apartments, as they intended to rest and dine ere they pursued their journey.

Lord Harold's first impulse was to continue his walk through the town: but scarcely was he moving away from the hotel, when an irresistible feeling made him turn back; and the thought arose within him that he should like to have an interview with Lady Saxondale. It was one of those mysterious inclinations which sometimes seize upon human beings, and for which they can scarcely account. We should observe that when first separated by his uncle from Lady Saxondale, he had rejoiced that he had not indissolubly linked his destiny with her's. Deep in his soul was the conviction that she had made him *something* which he was not before the intimacy of his connexion with her commenced; and therefore, when removed from the sphere of her dazzling charms, he had felt that he was happily rescued from the power of a Circe capable of practising the most dreadful spells. Thus, when he had ere now muttered to himself, in the court-yard of the hotel, that if he encountered Lady Saxondale again there was no fear of his wishing to marry her, he had really thought what he had thus expressed. Nor indeed were his sentiments now changed, or even impaired, in respect to that aversion to a matrimonial connexion with her ladyship,—inasmuch as her reputation was ruined in the world on account of all that had occurred at Saxondale Castle; and it was by no means likely that Harold Staunton would take such a woman as his wife. But on the other hand the impression of her voluptuous beauty was powerfully resuscitated in his mind; and it was perhaps for this reason that he longed for another interview with her. He lingered therefore hesitatingly at the gate of the hotel. Yes—he hesitated: for a sudden fear had arisen in his mind. What if he were watched by any spy or emissary of his uncle?—that uncle on whom he was so perfectly dependent! But no: it could scarcely be that his actions were thus espied. He was travelling unattended: there was no bribable valet to keep him under *surveillance*: he had not noticed during his sojourn of a few weeks on the Continent, that he had been followed by any individual: nothing suspicious had occurred to warrant such a belief;—and thus, after a little consideration, he came to the conclusion that the fear he had expressed to Lord Saxondale in respect to such an *espionnage*, was unfounded. Besides, when a person is more than half resolved to pursue some particular course, his imagination will suggest a dozen arguments for adopting it in opposition to every single one against it, and will likewise conjure up an abundance of reasoning to triumph over all apprehension. In a word, therefore, Lord Harold Staunton came to the conclusion to seek an interview with Lady Saxondale.

Passing into the hotel, he gave his card to the waiter,—bidding him take it up to the elder of the two ladies who had just arrived in the post-chaise. A few minutes afterwards the waiter re-appeared, with an intimation that Lady Saxondale would have great pleasure in seeing Lord Harold Staunton. The young nobleman was accordingly conducted up to a sitting apartment, where her ladyship awaited him. She was alone: for Juliana, on hearing from her mother that Lord Harold was at the hotel, had declined to see him. She was ashamed, after the terrific exposure at Saxondale Castle, to meet any one who was a witness of that painful scene, and who was consequently acquainted with her flagrant shame. Thus while she remained in a bed-chamber, arranging her toilet, which was disordered by many hours' travelling,—her mother received Lord Harold Staunton.

Her ladyship was standing when Harold entered the room; and he, advancing towards her, was prepared to display an equivalent amount of courtesy to that which he himself might receive. But Lady Saxondale was cold and distant: she did not proffer her hand;—and by the fact of receiving him standing, appeared to indicate that though she had not refused the interview, she was surprised that it had been sought, and wished its object to be promptly explained. Her countenance was somewhat care-worn: but in other respects the grandeur of her beauty was not impaired during the interval of a few weeks since Harold had last seen her in Lincolnshire.

"Perhaps you are astonished to behold me here?" he said, adopting as off-hand and easy a tone and manner as he could well call to his aid to rescue him from the awkwardness of the position in which he had thus placed himself.

"I presume you have a motive in seeking an interview," answered her ladyship coldly; "and I therefore beg that you will at once reveal it."

"I should have thought that after everything which has taken place between us," replied Harold, "and which consists of ties even more binding than those of a mere passing amour,—two individuals thus situated might have something to say to each other. For my own part, I must candidly confess that I had no special object in view: but with equal truth may I aver that I was impelled to seek this interview by some power that was irresistible."

"Of what use is it for us to talk of the past," inquired Lady Saxondale bitterly, "inasmuch as nothing that has been done can be recalled? But if there be aught that may be done *for the future*, and concerning which you would seek my counsel, you shall have it. Speak."

There was a certain mysterious significancy in Lady Saxondale's words and looks towards the latter part of her speech, that at once convinced Harold she had something in her mind; and his evil genius prompted him to ascertain what it was.

"I know not," he said, "that I have any counsel to ask: but it is possible—and indeed I think it

probable—that you may have something to suggest."

"Be seated:"—and Lady Saxondale took a chair, while she motioned Staunton to do the same: then, fixing upon him one of those regards in which the full power of her soul appeared to look out, sinister and mysterious, from her large dark eyes, she said, "Am I to suppose that you are still a mere weak child, tremblingly obedient to the will of a despot uncle?"

"I am afraid, Harriet," returned Staunton, "that you have expressed something which, though cuttingly severe, does but too closely approximate the truth."

"Then where is your courage," she asked scornfully and disdainfully, "that you thus consent tamely to be lashed liked the meanest hound? The very worm will turn against the heel of the strong man who tramples upon it: but you appear not to have even the courage of that worm!"—and still as she spoke her eyes were fixed upon him with a fascinating influence, and at the same time with a significancy that began to suggest strange and terrible things.

"Believe me," he answered, "that there are moments when my soul revolts against this tyranny to which I am bound hand and foot. Sometimes I even gnash my teeth with rage; and I long to rebel against the despot who tramples upon me."

"Ah! you long to rebel?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "Am I to suppose, then, that you have not the courage?"

"The courage? Yes!" replied Harold resolutely. "But the means — the method — the power——"

"These are always available for one who seeks them with the fixed purpose of making use thereof:"—and Lady Saxondale, as she spoke, drew her chair a little nearer to that in which Staunton was seated; while her voice became more mysteriously subdued and her manner more impressive.

"I do not understand you," said Harold: "what can I do? how can I act?"

"What can you do? how can you act?" echoed Lady Saxondale, as if in astonishment at the puerility of the questions. "Does your own position suggest nothing? Look at it—examine it well: what is it? You are totally dependent upon an uncle who has recently married the mother of his two illegitimate children. Think you that he cares not more for those children than for *you*, whom he regards as a scapegrace nephew? and will he not therefore do his best to keep his title and estates within the sphere of his own family, and away from you?"

"But how can he?" asked Staunton, quivering with suspense: for the fear was uppermost in his mind, although he thus seemed by his words to doubt the possibility of its realization. "The title goes to his legal heir—and the estates, which are entailed, follow in the same course. I am that legal heir."

"Yes—at present," answered Lady Saxondale: "but how long may you remain so?"

"The wife whom he has married, is forty-six years of age," observed Staunton; "and it would be ridiculous to suppose that he can entertain the hope of her presenting him with an heir."

"Not so ridiculous as you seem to think," rejoined the wily and astute Lady Saxondale. "There have been cases in which women have become mothers at that age—and even three or four years later: and therefore experience and surgical evidence are not against the eventuality—but in favour of it."

"Yes: but the chance is so remote—so excessively remote!"

"Do not argue thus," interrupted Lady Saxondale: "it is the height of folly on your part—because what is possible to happen, *may* happen: or, at all events, upon that plea may it be *done*."

"Still I do not understand you," interjected Staunton: and the quivering of his entire frame was as visible as the paleness with which dire apprehension had painted his cheeks.

"You have two chances against you," responded her ladyship; "and you are an idiot if you leave anything to chance."

"But those chances?"

"One is that the newly-married Marchioness of Eagledean may possibly become a mother: the other is that a supposititious child may be presented to the world as her own, and as the heir of Eagledean. Such things *have* been done——"

But here her ladyship suddenly stopped short, and with a species of recoil from the words she had just uttered.

"Yes—by heaven! it might be done," ejaculated Staunton: "it might be done!" he repeated, starting up from his seat in a paroxysm of torturing nervousness.

"And think you not, then, that it *will* be done?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Has not your uncle every possible interest to exclude you at his death from the title and estates of Eagledean, and to keep them in his own immediate family? His *illegitimate* children could not fail to be benefitted by the circumstance that one whom they would regard as their *legitimate* brother, has the heritage of Eagledean in the perspective."

"True—most true—*too* true!" ejaculated Lord Harold Staunton. "I shall be robbed of my inheritance—I shall become a beggar and a pauper on the face of the earth: unless——"

"Yes—unless you take a prompt and bold part," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Idiot that you have been, thus to lull yourself into even a moment's security! I presume that your uncle has sent you abroad, no doubt with the intention of keeping you for a length of time upon the Continent, in order that he may carry on his own machinations. Pray did he introduce you to this wife of his before you left England."

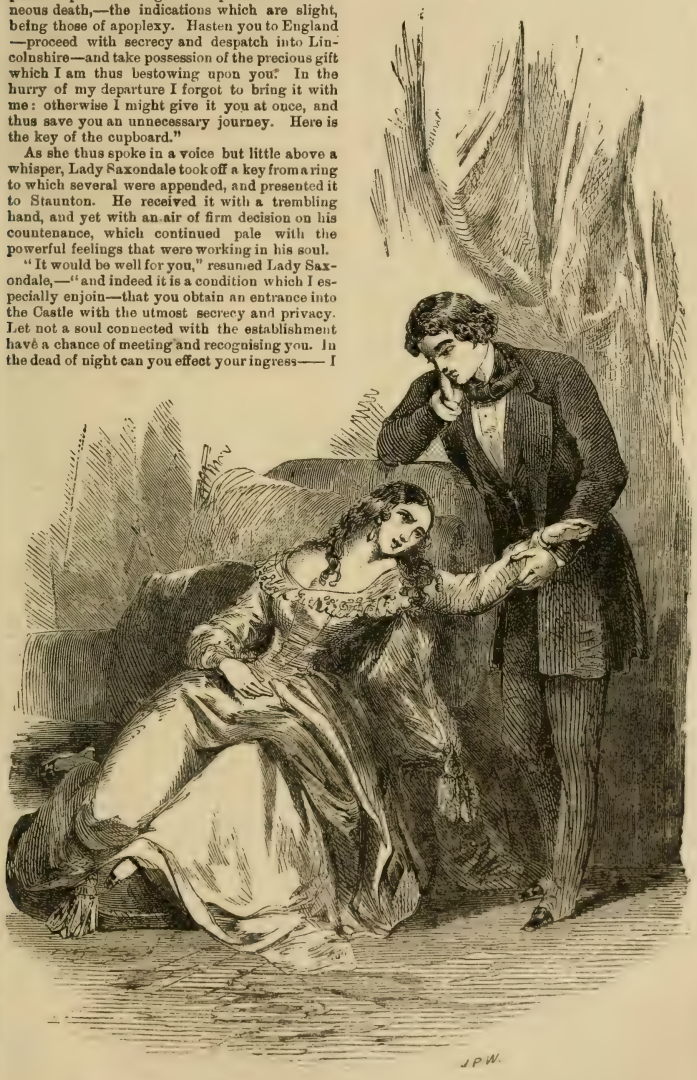
"No—he despatched me to the Continent at once. But I will endure his tyranny and risk his treachery no longer," continued the young nobleman, speaking with bitter vehemence. "You have aroused a spirit within me which will never rest until——"

"Until you have cleared from your path the only obstacle to the acquisition of the title and estates of Eagledean?"—and Lady Saxondale again bent upon him a look which full well expressed her terrible meaning. "And now," she continued, "that I have succeeded in arousing this spirit within you, I will furnish you with the means of carrying out your views effectively. Listen with attention. In a cupboard in my own bed-chamber at Saxondale Castle there is a phial enclosed in a sealed packet. This phial contains a poison so deadly that one drop of it

placed upon the tongue will produce instantaneous death,—the indications which are slight, being those of apoplexy. Hasten you to England —proceed with secrecy and despatch into Lincolnshire—and take possession of the precious gift which I am thus bestowing upon you." In the hurry of my departure I forgot to bring it with me: otherwise I might give it you at once, and thus save you an unnecessary journey. Here is the key of the cupboard."

As she thus spoke in a voice but little above a whisper, Lady Saxondale took off a key from a ring to which several were appended, and presented it to Staunton. He received it with a trembling hand, and yet with an air of firm decision on his countenance, which continued pale with the powerful feelings that were working in his soul.

"It would be well for you," resumed Lady Saxondale,—"and indeed it is a condition which I especially enjoin—that you obtain an entrance into the Castle with the utmost secrecy and privacy. Let not a soul connected with the establishment have a chance of meeting and recognising you. In the dead of night can you effect your ingress—— I



need not tell you by what means:"—and again she bent upon him a look of peculiar significancy.

"No, no—it is not necessary," he responded with nervous quickness: "and you need not fear that I shall be guilty of imprudence or indiscretion. For the counsel you have given me and the succour you are now lending me, my gratitude is your's. But have you nothing more to suggest? Your imagination is of a fertility to which mine own cannot pretend——"

"I understand you," interrupted Lady Saxondale: "it is not sufficient that I should place the weapon in your hand: but I must also teach you how to use it."

"Yes," rejoined Staunton: "for how can I introduce myself secretly and stealthily into my uncle's house? how can I obtain access to his chamber?"

"And even at the last moment your courage might fail you," observed Lady Saxondale. "Now, listen with attention once more. I happen to know —no matter how—that in the chapel at Saxondale Castle you may, if you choose, meet a certain person whom you will find a ready and willing instrument to serve your purpose. He is a man who for the sake of gold will hesitate at no crime which the human imagination can suggest, or of which human nature is capable. To him you may entrust the phial of which I have already told you how to possess yourself;—and rest assured that when he learns how he is to use it, he will neither hesitate nor quail. Give him not his reward until the work is done: but promise him five hundred pounds for the accomplishment of the deed—and he will afterwards leave England, so that you need not fear to be troubled by his importunities for the future."

"And who is this person that can render such valuable aid?" inquired Lord Harold, who had listened with trembling eagerness to the dark and terrible instructions which had just been given him.

"He answers to the name of Chiffin," responded her ladyship.

"Chiffin?" ejaculated Staunton, instantaneously struck with the name. "What! he of whom the newspapers sometime since spoke as the suspected murderer of a publican and his wife in a place called Agar Town? Ah! and now that I bethink me, my uncle mentioned this same individual to me as one whom you had employed——"

"You need not say any more," interrupted Lady Saxondale, with cold calmness: "I see that your uncle has been explicit enough in respect to my proceedings. Yes—it is perfectly true that he and William Deveril—both hated names, I can assure you—would have perished a few weeks ago, had it not been for some accident the particulars of which I have not learnt, but which in some way or another frustrated Chiffin's plan. But doubtless you are sufficiently acquainted with this individual's character, to be well aware that he is a fitting instrument for your purpose."

"None could serve me better," responded Harold. "A man who is already in fear of the law's vengeance, and who perhaps awaits but the means for enabling him to leave the country, is the best instrument I could obtain. But now, before I express my thanks for all this additional information you have given me," continued Staunton, "let us understand each other. What will *you* seek at my hands if I succeed in making myself Marquis of Eagledean?"

"Nothing," replied Lady Saxondale. "Can you not comprehend that I have a bitter vengeance to wreak upon this uncle of yours—and that I shall be satisfied in thus accomplishing the end through you? As for thanks, I need them not. But one more word of advice will I proffer:—which is, that you call to your aid all possible circumspection and prudence, wariness and caution; for it is a bold stroke that you are playing, though one well worth the venture. Ah! and there is yet something else that I may do for you. Doubtless your uncle has not been too munificent in the pecuniary means which he has placed at your disposal?—and you will require ample funds in the execution of your projects. Permit me to be your banker: it is not the first time."

Thus speaking, Lady Saxondale drew forth her purse, and presented Lord Harold Staunton with two English Bank-notes for five hundred pounds each.

"You said that you would accept no thanks, Harriet," he observed, as he received the gift: "but nevertheless do I proffer them. And now one word more. Where can I find you—or where can I communicate with you—if the necessity should arise?"

"I know not—I can name no address at present," answered Lady Saxondale. "Juliana and myself have for the last few weeks been living in retirement at some village fifty or sixty miles hence: but being recognized by English visitors, we resolved on changing our quarters. We are now on our way to Germany. In a few months' time, perhaps, we may return to England: or at least I shall—and then it may be that I shall have to congratulate you on bearing the title and possessing the estates of Eagledean. Our interview has been long enough. Farewell, Harold."

"Farewell, Harriet. What! not one embrace?"

"Give not way to a renewal of past follies," responded Lady Saxondale, coldly drawing back from the overtures of the young nobleman. "Farewell."

She beckoned him in a peremptory manner to leave the apartment: and he did so. On descending the stairs, he was informed by the waiter that his dinner was served up; and he accordingly repaired to the room in which the table was spread. But he had little appetite for the viands with which the board was covered: all his thoughts and all his senses, so to speak, were engrossed in the project which the fiendish ingenuity of his evil genius had put into his head. Indeed, so completely was he absorbed in the contemplation thereof, and in the prospect of soon inheriting the immense wealth of his uncle, that he even lost sight of his meeting with Lord Saxondale; and it was not until after her ladyship and Juliana had taken their departure from the hotel, that he again recollected the incident, and was thus reminded that he had not breathed a syllable concerning it to Edmund's mother.

"But no matter," he said to himself. "Doubtless Lady Saxondale has become perfectly indifferent to the proceedings of her son; and if he be an infatuated fool, let him remain so. It is not for me to take any trouble in the matter."

CHAPTER CXIX.

EDMUND AND THE BARONESS.

MEANWHILE Lord Saxondale and the Baroness de Charlemont were continuing their way towards Calais; and travelling all night, they reached that town at an early hour in the morning. Having breakfasted at an hotel, they embarked on board one of the steam-packets plying between Calais and Dover: and by mid-day reached the latter town. They at once proceeded to the *Ship Hotel*, the principal one at Dover; and while luncheon was getting in readiness, the Baroness ascended to a chamber with her maid, to amend her toilet. Lord Saxondale gave his orders to the waiter in respect to the repast; and was making some inquiries concerning the trains to London,—when, as the room door stood open, he heard the name of the Baroness mentioned by an unknown voice on the landing outside.

"No, really—is it she, though?" said another voice equally unknown to Lord Saxondale.

"Yes—I tell you again that she is none other than Madame de Charlemont, who——"

"Hush! we shall be overheard."

Then the voices ceased; and Saxondale's ears caught the sounds of two persons' footsteps descending the stairs.

The waiter, who was referring to a *Railway Guide* at the instant, did not notice that Edmund was paying any particular attention to what was being said on the landing; and most probably the man did not himself catch those observations. But when he had left the room, Saxondale said to himself, "My beloved Adelaide"—for that was the Christian name of the Baroness de Charlemont—"seems to create a sensation wherever she appears. It is no doubt her extraordinary beauty which thus makes her remarked."

But still there was something very much like a slight suspicion and vague misgiving floating in Saxondale's mind, like a dim and scarcely perceptible gossamer wreath in the twilight of evening; and infatuated though he were—frivolous and rash though he also was in obeying the impulse of his passions and giving way to the slightest whims of his instincts—he could not help thinking that it would have been well to know something more relative to the Baroness, ere he so precipitately made her an offer of his hand. Had she indeed given him the true version of the reasons for which she was slighted and shunned at the ball at the Odeon Theatre? could that treatment have arisen from the jealousy of the ladies and the vindictive disappointment of her would-be admirers of the other sex? The story, though so implicitly believed by Edmund when he first heard it, now struck him as somewhat extraordinary. If only a portion of the ladies—the younger ones, for instance—had neglected her for such a cause,—and only some portion of the gentlemen,—the tale would have been more feasible: but the shunning of her was so universal at the time—he himself constituting the only exception; for even the very stewards whose duty and office it was to be civil and pay attention to every one at such an assemblage, proffered not the slightest courtesy to the Baroness de Charlemont! But on the other hand, what could there possibly be against her? If a depraved character, and of notoriously damaged reputation, would she have had the audacity to present herself at that assemblage at all? and would not the stewards have given her a hint to retire? She could not be an adventuress: for that she *was* the Baroness de Charlemont was evident enough: the two strangers whose remarks had ere now caught his ears, corroborated that fact. She was evidently rich; for her mansion in Paris was splendid—her equipage appropriately handsome—and moreover, she had not only offered him a sum of money, but on happening to open her writing-desk at the hotel in Calais where they breakfasted, she had displayed a large quantity of notes and gold. What, then, could there be against her? Nothing—assuredly nothing!

All these reflections swept through the mind of Lord Saxondale in a much less space of time than it has taken us to record them; and scarcely had he arrived at the conclusion that the dim and vague suspicions which had begun to float in his mind were utterly unfounded, when she made her appearance in another toilet. Her exquisite beauty, which was really of transcending splendour, at once had the effect of banishing even the memory of those suspicions from the young nobleman's mind; and under the empire of her brilliant charms and softly sensuous smiles, he became all confidence and trustfulness once more.

When luncheon was over, Edmund was informed by one of the waiters that as there was some little difficulty in clearing the luggage at the Custom House, it would be necessary for him to proceed thither and make some formal declaration. He accordingly repaired to the Custom House; and was soon in the midst of the bustling crowd of government officials, hotel commissioners and waiters, and impatient travellers, in the room where all the luggage that had arrived in the steam-packet, was being inspected. He could not immediately obtain the attention of the proper officer to whom he had to address himself: and he therefore stood apart until his turn should come. Near the spot where he thus stationed himself, there was a group of young English gentlemen, whom he recognized to have been on board the packet; and he heard one of them say in a quick but subdued voice, "There! that's Lord Saxondale! It's he who was with the Baroness de Charlemont."

"Hush! he will overhear you," said another; and the group, in order to continue the conversation, moved a little farther off, and passed behind an immense pile of bales of goods; so that they were now hidden from Edmund's view.

Again did all those vague and indistinct suspicions spring up in Edmund's mind; and he instinctively drew close towards the pile of goods, so that he might be enabled to hear what was passing on the other side.

"But what did she do it for?" asked one of the young men.

"No one knows," replied another. "It's one of those things that baffle all conjecture."

"I dare say there was a lover at the bottom of it."

"Nothing of the sort! I never heard the Baroness de Charlemont's chastity called in question. On the contrary, it is well known that though her husband was so old and ugly, and so mutilated in the

wars, she never indulged her fancies elsewhere. At least, I mean that this is as well known as such things can be;—and at all events *this* at least is notorious—that she indignantly rejected anything in the shape of an overture, even on the part of the handsomest and best-born men of France."

"Then what *could* have been the motive?"

"How ridiculous to persevere in asking a question which, I tell you, no one can answer! But there's my turn to pass my luggage!"

Here the conversation terminated; and the group breaking up, Saxondale hastily stepped away from the spot where he had overheard the above fragments of their discourse. Almost immediately afterwards he was called to attend to the business which had brought him thither: it was only some trivial formality, which need not here be mentioned, and which was speedily fulfilled. The little matter being thus terminated, he began to retrace his way towards the hotel. Pondering upon all that he had overheard, he felt convinced that there *was* some mystery attached to his charming Baroness;—and that it was sufficient to engross the interest of those who knew anything about her, was likewise sufficiently plain. But what could it be? No eulogy could be higher than that which he had heard so spontaneously proclaimed in respect to her chastity; and to a certain extent it corroborated her own statement, that she had indignantly refused many gallant overtures. Consequently, on that point where a lover is most likely to be susceptible, there was no imputation against the Baroness de Charlemont. But still recurred the question—what was it that had thrown such a mystic interest and romantic haze about her name? Something had been alluded to in which the "motive" was discussed: what could that something be? It would appear that she must have done something which was unaccountable: but surely it could be naught of a disgraceful or degrading character: for if so, how could she have found her way into the midst of that brilliant assemblage at the Odeon Theatre? True enough was it that she was left in isolation there: but yet no one had ventured to make a movement for her expulsion. Altogether it was bewildering; and though Saxondale could not help thus reflecting upon the matter, it ceased to give him much uneasiness—if any at all—after the assurance he had gathered that her reputation as a woman was spotless. It was now therefore a sentiment of curiosity more than anything else, which inspired his reflections and blended itself with the infatuated passion he experienced towards her.

As he ascended the staircase of the hotel, he thought to himself that he would tell the Baroness very candidly all he had heard, and leave her to explain it. For he now recollected that on the previous day, Lord Harold, on hearing her name mentioned, had repeated it in a manner which had made but little impression on him at the time, but which now he had no difficulty in attributing to the same degree of mysterious interest which he had since seen manifested in respect to the Baroness de Charlemont. He therefore entered the room where he had left her, with the intention of saying something on the subject: but when he beheld her half-reclining upon a low ottoman, in a position most voluptuously charming, his ideas were once again all turned into another channel.

Wearied with travelling a whole day and night—and with the voyage from Calais to Dover in addition—the Baroness, throwing herself on that ottoman in the handsomely furnished room of the hotel, had sunk into a state of dreamy repose—that half-slumber from which a refreshing and soothing sensation is derived, but in which the mind does not altogether lose its consciousness. Thus, when Edmund entered the apartment, she opened her eyes languidly, and extended her hand to greet him. He hastened towards her—he caught that hand, so white, so warm, so plump—he bent down, and imprinted kisses on her cheeks: then he remained standing near the pile of cushions on which her head reclined, and which sustained her splendid form in a half-sitting position;—and as she smiled up at him, he surveyed her with all the rapture of that passion wherewith she had inspired him. There seemed to be an unstudied air of softly sensuous languor pervading her entire form, and which, without the slightest immodesty, was ineffably provocative. Her tresses and ringlets lay like dark gold about her throat and on her ivory shoulders: her dress, not too low for decency, revealed a sufficiency of the bust to enable the imagination to complete the picture of the rounded and glowing contours of which the eye caught a portion: the folds of her drapery developed while concealing the shapeliness of her well-formed limbs,—defining their sweeping length and rich but symmetrical modelling; while the exquisitely shaped feet peered from beneath the skirt of the garment. And as Edmund, after running his eyes over that superb figure, rested them again upon the countenance, he knew not which feature to admire the most,—the large blue eyes appearing to swim in a sea of languor, and full of melting tenderness—the rich red lips apart, revealing the pearly teeth—or the cheeks where the vermeil of the peach was shaded delicately off until it merged into the lily whiteness of the general complexion. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, Saxondale felt a slight mingling of the sentiment together with the grosser and more sensual feelings with which the grand and brilliant beauty of the Baroness de Charlemont had inspired him. Indeed, he might almost be said to be downright in love,—not a love that merely sought animal gratification—but that which is of a more refined quality. Could he therefore—even if he now remembered the circumstance—ask a single question relative to aught which might perchance conjure up some unpleasant memory in the mind of this magnificent creature? But he had ceased to think of it altogether: he was lost—bewildered—intoxicated, in the strength of his passion.

For two hours did they converse upon the rapturous topic of love, their immediate plans, and their future prospects. The Baroness possessed a beautifully melodious voice; and when it wove the language of love in blended tones of silvery softness and flute-like mellowness, permeated with the limpid clearness of the crystal streamlet's flow, it sounded like the music of paradise to the ears of her admirer. He hung upon her words with an increasing fondness, of that sentimental quality which had begun to entwine itself with his more sensual longings; and thus all the greater was the hold which the Baroness obtained on his heart. And she told him how she had liked him the very first moment she

beheld him—and that this was not on the night of the ball, but a few days previously, when she was riding in her carriage in the Champs Elysées, and had seen him in the same equipage with Lord and Lady Petersfield. It was thus, she went on to observe, that she was led to inquire of one of her domestics whom that equipage contained: and the servant, happening to know, was enabled to inform her. And she proceeded to state how much she was rejoiced, and how infinite was the secret satisfaction she experienced, when finding herself isolated at the ball, he who had already struck her fancy on a previous occasion, was *then* the very one—and the only one—to accost her; and she hesitated not to avow that the feeling of gratitude with which he had thus inspired her, was of that deep and tender nature that it required but a little more kindness to make it expand into love. It was thus that she accounted for the exceeding rapid growth of the sentiment which had led her, after so brief an acquaintance, to accept his overtures and consent to become his wife.

To all these things did Edmund listen with rapturous attention; and he thought himself supremely happy in having won the love of a woman whose beauty was so transcending, and whose voice sank down like delicious harmony into his soul. When the hour for departure came, and he found himself seated by her side in the railway-carriage, he bitterly regretted the presence of the maid, who was thus a constraint upon them, and prevented the discourse from being continued in a similarly captivating strain. For the maid, though a Frenchwoman, understood English perfectly; and the Baroness chose to be very circumspect in her presence. Nevertheless the discourse, though turning on general matters, was pleasant enough; and as Madame de Charlemont possessed great conversational powers, —characterized, too, by a certain brilliancy of wit which savoured rather of the land in which marriage had naturalized her, than of her own native England, —she proved the most agreeable of companions. Thus the time slipped away rapidly enough; and London was reached ere Saxondale thought that half the journey had been completed.

On arriving in the metropolis, the Baroness and her maid proceeded to a West End hotel, according to previous arrangement; and Lord Saxondale, taking an affectionate leave of her, repaired with his valet to the mansion in Park Lane. Though his mother had gone abroad, the establishment was maintained there upon the same footing as ever; and thus everything was ready for Lord Saxondale's reception. Intoxicated with happiness, he could not forget his habit of sustaining his natural spirits, when excited, by means of artificial stimulant: and having discussed the larger portion of a bottle of champagne, he retired to rest to dream of the Baroness de Charlemont.

In the morning, when his valet made his appearance to assist him in the process of the toilet, the idea suddenly struck Lord Saxondale that it was probable he might know something more than himself concerning the mystery which evidently invested the object of his adoration: and he saw no harm in endeavouring to elicit such particulars, should the man be enabled to afford them.

"Well," he said, in an off-hand conversational manner, "I suppose you have guessed by this time that you are likely to have a mistress as well as a master?"

"Yes, my lord," responded the valet: "I certainly entertained that impression."

"I don't usually condescend to consult my inferiors on such subjects," continued Edmund, with his characteristic aristocratic superciliousness; "but as I know your fidelity and attachment, I don't mind asking you whether you think that the lady is one who will do honour to the family into which she is about to enter, and equal honour to my good taste?"

"Yes, my lord—assuredly, my lord," answered the valet, who knew Edmund's disposition well enough to be inclined to pander to his inclinations in any way. "Your lordship could not do otherwise than display the most exquisite taste."

"Well, I think I am rather up to the mark in that way," observed Edmund, surveying himself in the mirror. "By the bye, that maid of her ladyship's seems a very decent body. Of course you and she have had some little chat together?—and no doubt she has told you many little things connected with her ladyship——I mean such little traits and points of history which of course ooze out in familiar conversation?"

"We have not had much opportunity, my lord, for such discourse," answered the valet; "for the maid travelled inside the chaise, you know, my lord, all the way to Calais—and was likewise in the same carriage with you, my lord, and her ladyship on the railway."

"Nevertheless, you *must* have had some little time to chat—on board the packet, for instance—and when taking your meals together at the hotels."

"Oh! yes, my lord," rejoined the valet.

"Well, then, what did you talk about?" continued Saxondale, inwardly anathematizing his domestic for not coming to the point at once. "You see—there is no disguising the fact—I know very little of her ladyship——I mean her previous history, and so forth——"

"It seems, my lord, that her ladyship has had a deal of trouble."

"Ah, indeed! In what way?"

"I don't exactly know, my lord: but her maid frequently alluded to something of the sort. Thus, for instance, she said that her ladyship went out into society for the first time since her trouble, the other night when your lordship met her——at the theatre I believe it was?"

"Just so. But what trouble is this, I wonder? I am really very sorry to think that so charming a creature could have undergone much trouble. Yet what a fool I am. I understand what it means! The maid alluded to the Baron de Charlemont's death."

"Very likely, my lord. But I think that her ladyship must have experienced some other sad affliction: for I remember hearing the maid saying that her mistress could have resigned herself to that loss, if it hadn't been for what followed."

"And what did follow?" inquired Saxondale.

"Ah! that I don't know, my lord. Her ladyship's maid never said any more to the purpose; and at first I did not like to seem impertinent and ask questions. Afterwards, when I might have ventured an inquiry, something always happened to put an end to the discourse."

"Ah, well!" observed Edmund, seeing that his valet was but little wiser than himself in the matter: "her ladyship will of course confide to me all her grievances—and it will be my duty as well as pleasure to console them. Nevertheless, you might go to the hotel presently to pay a friendly visit to the maid, and just try to draw her out a bit. Not, you know, that I have any curiosity in the affair: for I have every assurance that her ladyship is as virtuous and as good as she is beautiful and accomplished. But still, if you *could* find out what her troubles have been, it would be more easy for me to administer the proper consolation. And therefore, all things considered, you can do this—and remain at the hotel till I call. Now, between you and me, I am going to get a special license; and the marriage shall take place to-day——"

"To-day, my lord?" exclaimed the valet, startled somewhat out of his wonted composure by the announcement of this precipitation: but instantaneously recovering himself, he observed, "Of course, my lord—it is quite natural—and in your lordship's position, there is no need to wait."

"To be sure not—no need at all. I am my own master—or at least I mean to show my guardians that I am; and therefore it is not likely I shall postpone the consummation of my happiness. By the bye, about the bridemaids—they are indispensable I suppose? and some one to give the bride away too—eh?"

"Not absolutely indispensable, my lord," suggested the valet. "At St. George's, Hanover Square, the clerk is accustomed to give the bride away; and bridemaids are not needed, unless one likes. If it were otherwise, a great many marriages that are hurried, would not take place at all."

"True," observed Saxondale. "It would entail a great deal of bother and trouble upon me to go ferreting out a couple of bridemaids: and they are not, as you say, of the slightest use. So I will just pen a note to the Baroness to tell her that for several reasons the ceremony must take place as privately as possible——I will say that Marlow and Malton, the lawyers, have got scent of it——and I will request her to be in readiness by twelve o'clock. I can get the license, and go and see the parson, and everything in the meantime. Besides, if I send you with this note, it will be an excuse for you to call at the hotel; and you can get into conversation with the maid. Don't forget that part of the business."

"No, my lord," answered the valet.

Edmund then sat down, and wrote a brief but tender billet to the Baroness,—immediately despatching it by his valet to the hotel.

We need not linger in detail upon this portion of our narrative. Let us therefore hasten to state that it was about half-past eleven o'clock when Lord Saxondale alighted from his private carriage—or rather his mother's—at the door of the hotel just alluded to; and he was somewhat disappointed at not finding his valet in readiness to receive him. He certainly wished to exchange a few words with the domestic, and ascertain what particular circumstance it was to which such mysterious allusion had been made, and which he had no doubt was the *one* special secret he had so much longed to fathom. But the valet was not there: at least he did not make his appearance;—and Saxondale did not choose to keep the Baroness waiting while he instituted inquiries after his servant. He accordingly followed the waiter who was in readiness to escort him to the sitting-room occupied by Madame de Charlemont; and in a few moments he was in that lady's presence. The waiter retired: they were now alone together;—and immediately forgetting all his anxiety to learn the particular secret above referred to, Edmund hastened to fold his Adelaide in his arms.

Warm and fervid was the embrace; and when he had leisure to gaze upon her, he thought that she appeared more gloriously handsome than he had yet seen her. She was elegantly dressed, in an apparel which though not actually a wedding costume, was nevertheless sufficiently appropriate for a nuptial ceremony of a private character, and for which no elaborate preparations had been made. Indeed, her toilet was not merely elegant, but was also characterized by the most graceful simplicity; and it set off her charms to the fullest advantage. The flutter of her heart had heightened the colour upon her cheeks: there was a deeper tenderness in the eyes, which made her look sweetly bewitching; and Saxondale again experienced all the empire of her enchanting loveliness. She had received his note—she consented to the arrangements suggested therein—she believed his tale that the attorneys had caught an inkling of what was going on—and she was in the flutter of suspense lest aught should occur to interrupt the ceremony. But he had the special license in his pocket—the clergyman had been spoken to—and he assured her that when they reached the church, everything would be in readiness.

Another embrace—and he conducted her down stairs,—her maid, who was likewise well and tastefully dressed, accompanying them. Again did Saxondale—recollecting the mission he had entrusted to his valet—look around for this individual: but he was not to be seen. For a moment he felt annoyed—and was even inclined to tarry and make inquiries after the man: but as he lingered for an instant, the Baroness threw upon him a look replete with so much indescribable tenderness—and she seemed so miraculously beautiful as she thus bent her regards upon him—that all his thoughts became once more suddenly engrossed by her; and he hastened to assist her into the carriage.

In ten minutes the equipage rolled up to the door of St. George's Church, Hanover Square. Edmund assisted the Baroness to alight,—and conducted her into that fashionable matrimonial temple,—the maid following at a short distance. The clergyman and the clerk were punctual in attendance: and without delay did the ceremony commence. No doubt the Baroness dreaded lest Edmund's guardians should suddenly make their appearance: for the colour went and came in frequent transitions upon her countenance—and as the bridegroom knelt by her side, he could perceive by the undulating movements of her dress, that her bosom was heaving and falling with quick palpitations. He however had no fear of the kind: for he felt well assured that Marlow and Malton could know nothing of what was going on—and Petersfield, even if he had already arrived in London, would not have the slightest idea where to look for them at that particular moment. And the ceremony *did* proceed

without interruption: it was accomplished—and the Baroness de Charlemont became Lady Saxondale. Thus all in an instant was the appellation of *Dowager* affixed to the title of that other Lady Saxondale who was journeying with her daughter upon the Continent, and who little suspected what was going on in London at the time.

Yes—the ceremony was over; and, as usual, the bride and bridegroom repaired to the vestry while the clergyman registered the marriage and furnished the proper certificate. The Baroness, who had been much excited by her apprehensions and other feelings throughout the morning, sat down,—Edmund standing near, and bending over her to whisper words of love and tenderness in her ear. While thus engaged, he caught sight—through the vestry door, which stood half open—of his valet, who was now loitering just outside the threshold.

"Pardon my absence for a few moments," whispered Saxondale to his bride:—"I wish to give some instructions to my domestic. The servants generally, at the house, do not know what is taking place; and I will send him on at once to make the announcement—so that you may be spared some little awkwardness and confusion on reaching Park Lane."

The bride, by means of a tender and endearing look, expressed her gratitude for this consideration on her husband's part; and he stepped out of the vestry. Immediately on joining his valet, it struck Edmund that there was something peculiar in the man's look; and if he did not feel exactly frightened, he nevertheless experienced a sudden sensation of suspense which was somewhat painful.

"Why did you not meet me at the hotel, as I ordered you?" he asked, drawing the valet aside to a little distance from the open door of the vestry.

"I quite mistook your lordship," was the response. "I humbly ask pardon—but I really thought your lordship's instructions were that I was to join your lordship in Park Lane after I had been to the hotel."

"No such thing!" promptly ejaculated the bridegroom. "However, it was a mistake, and can't be helped. The ceremony is over: and——and——" he was about to say "I am the happiest of men:" but he could not get the words out of his lips, for he saw that his valet's countenance was becoming still more peculiar in its expression, and indeed was clouded with a depth of gloom: so he hurriedly asked, "Well, have you anything to tell me?"

"No, my lord—nothing——nothing particular ——no, nothing:"—and the valet stammered, looking at the same time so strange that Saxondale was seized with a vague and unknown terror, and might have been knocked down with a straw.

"Yes—but I know that you *have* something to tell me," he exclaimed nervously, but in a subdued tone. "Come—out with it! Have you been talking to the maid?"

"Yes, my lord—a little. Your lordship commanded me to do so."

"To be sure! Why don't you proceed?" demanded Edmund, his countenance white and his limbs trembling with apprehension. "Now tell me—is there anything the matter?——I see there is!——have I made a fool of myself?——don't you perceive that suspense is killing me? Speak, I say!"

"Well, my lord—since you order me,"—and the valet stammered more and more, and likewise became more and more confused,—"it is my duty to tell your lordship that——that——"

"That what?"—and Saxondale felt as if he could strike his domestic a savage blow for thus tantalizing him. "What is it your duty to tell me? what have you learnt?"

"That the Baroness——her ladyship——Lady Saxondale, that now is, I mean——"

"Well, well?"

"Was tried, my lord——"

"Tried?" echoed Edmund: and his brain appeared to whirl.

"Yes, my lord——I am very sorry to have such bad news—but her ladyship was tried——She was acquitted however?" quickly ejaculated the valet, as if catching at this circumstance as a great consolation.

"Tried and acquitted?" repeated Saxondale, who felt as if the church was all spinning round and round.

"Yes, my lord——unfortunately her ladyship was tried——"

"What for? what for?"

"The——the——murder of her husband!"

CHAPTER CXX.

SAXONDALE CASTLE AGAIN.

We must now transport the attention of our readers to Saxondale Castle. It was about eleven o'clock at night—four days after those incidents which occurred at the hotel at Beauvais—and Chiffin the Cannibal was smoking his pipe in the cloister leading out of the chapel. No candle was burning there; for that would be dangerous, because calculated to attract attention to the circumstance: but the night was transcendingly clear and beautiful, and the moon was pouring its argentine lustre through the narrow arched windows of that cloister. The reader will remember that this place was described in the opening chapter of our narrative, as containing several tombs and monuments, and in the midst a colossal figure of black marble, representing a warrior in complete armour, with his vizor closed. The moonbeams fell upon this giant-statue, at the foot of which Chiffin the Cannibal was seated. There it stood—that sculptured shape—its left hand upon the hip—its right arm extended as if menacingly pointed towards the door communicating with the chapel, and which stood open. It was a strange spectacle—had any one been there to view it,—that ferocious-looking ruffian seated on the pedestal which supported the colossal image that towered above him; and as the silver lustre of the moon threw out this group of marble and man into strong relief, there was a singular blending of effects produced by the awe-imposing solemnity of the former and the savage grimness of the latter.

Chiffin wore that same suit of respectable broadcloth apparel which had been lent him by the landlord of the boozing-ken in Bethnal Green. Some weeks had elapsed since the murder in Agar Town,—some weeks therefore since we beheld him a wandering fugitive, well-nigh goaded to desperation by the loss of the money of which Tony Wil-

kins plundered him. It will be remembered that by a robbery committed on the highway, he obtained some little money—but not enough to enable him to leave the kingdom. He had therefore put into execution his original design of taking up his quarters in Saxondale Castle. To obtain ingress to the uninhabited portion of the building, was by no means difficult: but as he had entered by one of the tapestry-chambers—that very one in which Lady Saxondale and Juliana had attempted self-destruction, and the door thereof had been locked—he was compelled to force it open in order to make his way to the chapel and the place of tombs, which he considered to be the safest abiding-place. For he concluded that the domestics would sometimes visit the tapestry-chambers for the purpose of keeping them in order: whereas the same care was not needed by the old marbles in the cloister. In the middle of the night he was accustomed to make his way to the larder in the other wing of the building, and help himself to such provender as he needed,—but taking care to leave as few traces of such a visit as possible. In this respect he might have carried on the same game for a considerable period without the chance of detection; inasmuch as where there was a large number of domestics, there was little chance of the food being missed, especially as the larder was always well supplied.

He had no difficulty in gathering, from a variety of circumstances, that Lady Saxondale was not at the Castle; and he therefore supposed that she must be in London: for as a matter of course he had not the slightest idea that she had gone abroad. After a short sojourn at the Castle, he found his position so irksome—felt so miserable and lonely—and was moreover so anxious to get out of the country on account of the active search which he felt convinced must be making after him, that he resolved to pen a letter to Lady Saxondale and demand pecuniary succour. Writing materials he easily obtained by a visit to the library at dead of night; and having written his letter, addressing it to her ladyship in Park Lane, he stole out of the Castle, walked to the nearest village, and consigned it to the local post-office. This being done, he made his way back to his quarters in the Castle; and that was the only occasion on which he ventured out since his arrival there. Having written in urgent and positive terms, he expected that Lady Saxondale would come down into Lincolnshire expressly to afford him the succour he required: for by no other means could the transaction be accomplished. Day after day however passed—night after night went by—and his solitude in the chapel and the cloister continued unbroken by the appearance of her ladyship. And no wonder: for she was on the Continent;—and though his letter had been forwarded to her, along with others from England, she had not the slightest notion of returning expressly to comply with his demand. She was well aware that he dared not proclaim to the world anything he knew concerning her: for that would be tantamount to a voluntary surrender of himself into the hands of justice. As for his being secreted in the Castle—this circumstance troubled her but little: for even if he should take it into his head to help himself to such portable articles as might strike his predatory fancy, the loss would be comparatively insignificant, and less than the amount in money which she would have to give him if she paid attention to his letter. But ere continuing the thread of our narrative, we should remark that it was from this letter that Lady Saxondale was enabled to inform Lord Harold Staunton of the fact that he would meet in the chapel at Saxondale Castle so fitting an instrument for the murderous project which she herself had suggested.

Some weeks, then, had elapsed since Chiffin the Cannibal took up his quarters at the Castle; and as yet the presence of any such intruder remained unsuspected by the servants. If the cook, on descending in the morning, happened to observe that some joint or cold pie had been encroached upon in the larder after she had closed the premises over-night ere retiring to rest, she naturally concluded that one of her fellow-servants, feeling hungry, had paid the provender a visit when she herself had gone to bed: and thus nothing was said upon the subject. On one occasion only, during that interval of a few weeks, did the servants repair to the tapestry-rooms to dust and air them; and then the circumstance of the door of one having been forced open, struck them as singular, but led to no search elsewhere—for the impression was strong with the household, ever since the night of the attempted self-destruction by Lady Saxondale and her daughter, that the western side of the Castle was haunted by a mischievous spirit. Thus Chiffin the Cannibal had hitherto remained in perfect security.

Now let us return to that particular night on which we behold him seated at the foot of that colossal statue, smoking his pipe, and ruminating upon his circumstances. The more than usual grimness of his countenance and sullen ferocity of his looks were a sufficient indication that he was by no means satisfied with the life he was leading. He could not understand how it was that Lady Saxondale did not trouble herself to come down into Lincolnshire and give him the means for getting out of the country. His patience was exhausted; and he was now thinking seriously of making his way to London at all risks, for the purpose of obtaining an interview with her ladyship. Something of this sort he felt that he must do. He could not endure the horrible gloom and solitude of his position any longer: he was moreover becoming vindictively savage against Lady Saxondale herself, for what he considered to be her neglect of him—especially after he was the means of saving her life and that of her daughter when they attempted self-destruction.

It was in the midst of these reflections, and while seated on the pedestal of the black marble statue, that Chiffin thought he heard the sound of a window opening somewhere in the range of building to which the chapel and cloister belonged. He listened with suspended breath; and in a few moments he distinctly heard the sound of the window closing again.

"Who the deuce can this be?" said Chiffin to himself, and not without a certain degree of apprehension. "It looks as if some one was a-coming by just the very same way that I've always been accustomed to take when I've honoured this here Castle with my presence."

While thus musing, he continued to listen attentively; and in a few moments he heard a door opening. The sound of that door he knew well: it

was the one belonging to the tapestry-room by which he was wont to make his entry—the one, in short, which he himself had recently broken open. Some one, then, was approaching. Who could it be? —who but some ill-intentioned person would effect his ingress thus stealthily? But if a robber, Chiffin had nothing to fear: dog eats not dog. What if it were an officer of justice? Ah! that would be quite a different thing; and the Cannibal clutched his club with a firmer grasp and with a more ferocious grimness of look as the thought thus swept through his imagination.

But what course should he adopt? The door of that tapestry-room had opened—footsteps were heard——Ah! and now the door of the chapel itself grated on its hinges. Chiffin's first impulse was to hasten and conceal himself behind one of the tombs: but a second thought altered his determination. If the individual approaching were really an officer of justice, he would not have come alone; nor would he have made his entry in such a manner. Nor was it likely the person was a robber: for if so, it was probable he would have sought an entry into that part of the castle where there was something to steal, and not into this uninhabited portion. Then, who could it be, save and except an emissary from Lady Saxondale—and his letter was about to receive due attention? With this last idea influencing him, Chiffin rose up from his seat on the pedestal of the statue, and advanced along the cloister into the chapel. There, by the faint glimmering light which penetrated more feebly than into the place of tombs, the Cannibal beheld a tall, slender figure, evidently that of a gentleman—but whose countenance was completely concealed by the brims of a large slouching hat. The individual at the same time perceived Chiffin, whose advancing footsteps he had already heard; and a half-subdued expression of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"Your name is Chiffin?" he at once said.

"Well, I don't know that there's the least use in saying it's Smith, or anything else," responded the Cannibal: "therefore, with your leave, I'll introduce myself to you as Mr. Chiffin; and if I don't put *Esquire* to my name, it is that I'm not proud. But whom may you be, sir?"

"I am Lord Harold Staunton," was the answer.

"Then, my lord," said the Cannibal, taking off his hat, "I am your most obedient servant."

"I suppose you can guess who has sent me?" continued the nobleman, now putting back the slouching hat somewhat, in order that he might obtain a better view of the Cannibal's countenance, so far as the feebly glimmering light would permit.

"There's no difficulty about that, my lord," replied the latter. "Lady Saxondale is a very good friend of mine; and I've no doubt she has given you summut that will be very acceptable to me."

"Softly," observed Harold. "It is perfectly true that you may earn a considerable sum of money, if you like; but it will not be paid over to you unless so earnt:"—then as the idea suddenly occurred to Staunton, that Chiffin might make an attack upon him in order to plunder him of whatsoever he might have about his person, he hastened to add, "Nor have I even the money with me now: but it shall be forthcoming."

"Well, this isn't over satisfactory," growled the Cannibal. "Howsomever, let's know what it is her ladyship wants done: and I am not the man to flinch. I like serving the aristocracy: for I must admit that if they are uncommon ready to do queer things, they are equally willing to pay handsome for them."

"Lady Saxondale requires nothing at your hands," answered Staunton, scarcely able to conceal the disgust and loathing he felt for the wretch, whom nevertheless he meant to employ. "It is I myself that have a task for you to undertake."

"Well and good, my lord: nothing like extending one's connexion. But if you just step into this cloister here, we can sit down and talk more at our ease."

"No," replied Harold, who was fully on his guard against any snare as well as sudden treachery: "we can talk well enough where we are. In the first place, let me ask whether you would like to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Ah, that I should!" exclaimed Chiffin. "But it is the price of murder, I'll be bound, by the amount of it!"

"Hush!" said Harold, feeling his blood run cold at the utterance of that dreadful *word*, though he had brought himself to reflect with cool composure upon the *thing* itself.

"There's no fear of being overheard," said Chiffin, —"unless it is by the ghosts of the dead that's buried in them tombs—or by that chap in black marble there. But I've been here a matter of some weeks, and hav'n't found myself troubled. The fact is, my lord, I'm more afraid, under present circumstances, of the living than the dead. But go on. I've told you it likes me well to earn the money; and you can now say what it's for."

"You yourself have already hinted—or more than hinted," returned Staunton. "It is——"

"Murder? Well then, who's the person? and where's it to be done?"

"The place where it is to be done, is a considerable way off," answered Staunton. "No matter who the person is. I will tell you that when we are near the spot itself."

"But I must inform your lordship," observed Chiffin, "that it's rather inconvenient for me to travel much about—particklar in the day time: cos why, being raythor a popular character, I'm uncommonly sought after."

"You shall travel by night, if you will," responded Staunton. "My principal object in seeking you out at once, was to make the bargain."

"It's made, then, my lord—and the thing itself is as good as done."

"Await me here," said Harold, after some few moments' reflection; "and we will make farther arrangements. I am about to penetrate into the other part of the building."

"That's what I often do," responded Chiffin. "Shall I accompany your lordship?"

"No. Remain here:"—and having thus spoken in a somewhat peremptory manner, Lord Harold was about to quit the chapel, when suddenly bethinking himself of something, he observed, "By the bye, I may require the means of procuring a light."

"And I can accommodate you," rejoined the Cannibal, at the same time drawing forth from one of his pockets a box containing matches, which he handed to the young nobleman.

Staunton then stole forth from the chapel; and threading the passage, reached the corridor communicating with the inhabited portions of the immense establishment. The moonlight penetrated through the windows; and as he beheld his shadow on the wall, he felt all the criminal ignominy of his position —as if he were a sneaking thief, prowling about the place where not long back he had been a known and acknowledged guest. But he passed onward, moving cautiously and stealthily,—stopping short every now and then to listen—and holding himself in readiness should he hear other footsteps, to take refuge in one of the many rooms by the doors of which he was passing. However, he continued his way undisturbed; and in a few minutes reached the door of that chamber which Lady Saxondale occupied when at the Castle.

But to his inexpressible annoyance, he found it locked. This was an event for which he was totally unprepared—a casualty indeed which had never once struck him. What was he to do? He tried the key of the cupboard which Lady Saxondale had given him: but it was much too small to turn the bolt of that lock. He leant hard against the door to ascertain if there were the chance of pushing it open: but it remained fast and immoveable. Ah! a thought struck Harold. Chiffin would no doubt succour him in this difficulty; and he at once began to retrace his way towards the chapel.

"Well, my lord," said the Cannibal, surprised to find him return thus promptly; "you've soon done your work, whatever it is."

"On the contrary," answered the young nobleman, "I have been unable to accomplish it. The truth is, it suits my purpose to penetrate into a particular chamber: but the door is locked."

"A door?" exclaimed Chiffin contemptuously. "What's a door? A dozen of 'em shouldn't keep me out, if I was resolved to get into a particklar place."

"Then come and open this particular one for me," said Harold. "But let us tread cautiously, for fear of alarming the household."

"*This* is what I do as I tramp about the place at night when going after my grub:"—and stooping down, Chiffin speedily whipped off his lace-up boots.

"Come then," said Staunton, who being more lightly shod, did not think it necessary to adopt the same precaution.

They issued forth from the chapel together, Chiffin carrying his club in his hand; and Lord Harold, observing this, took care to make him go in front as a wise precaution. In this manner they reached the door of Lady Saxondale's chamber; and Chiffin, taking a large nail from his pocket, endeavoured to pick the lock. This however he failed in accomplishing after a trial of about a couple of minutes: so putting his shoulder against the door, he burst it open with as much ease as skill. That is to say, he accomplished it with so peculiar a knack, that it made far less noise than Harold had fancied and feared when he saw what the man was about to do. Nevertheless, it did create a certain disturbance; and to the ineffable consternation of Lord Harold, as well as the momentary discomfiture of Chiffin, a cry of alarm in a female voice burst forth from the interior of the room. The Cannibal however instantaneously recovered his presence of mind; and rushing in, he dashed up to the bed, saying in a low but fearfully savage tone, "Silence this moment—or I will beat your brains out!"

"For heaven's sake do the woman no mischief!" said Lord Harold, following close at his heels, and speaking those words in a hurried and excited manner: for he was apprehensive that murder was about to be done—and he did not wish to have more crimes committed than were necessary.

"Oh, pray don't hurt me! pray don't hurt me!" said the female voice, speaking in wild terror. "I won't make a noise—I will lie quiet—I will do anything you desire."

"Well, then, you had better keep to your word—that's all I can tell you," was the Cannibal's growling response; "and if you do, no harm shall happen."

Lord Harold at once recognised the voice of Lucilla, one of Lady Saxondale's maids; and he was seized with the cruelest bewilderment how to act. Perhaps the girl had recognised *his* voice also? If so, the rumour would get spread abroad of this seeming burglarious entry on his part—and what would be thought? But he had gone too far to retreat: his position was desperate—and he decided upon pursuing at any risk the course on which he had entered. Fortunately the room was involved in almost complete obscurity: for no candle was burning, and the closed draperies at the window shut out the moonlight. Thus, if by good luck Lucilla should have been too much overcome by her own terrors to recognise his voice, there was no chance of her distinguishing his person.

All these reflections swept through the mind of Lord Harold Staunton in far less time than it has taken us to explain them; and being well acquainted with the chamber, for reasons which the reader can no doubt guess, he had not the slightest difficulty in finding the cupboard. Taking the key from his pocket, he opened it, and began feeling amongst the various articles its shelves contained, for the sealed packet. His hand encountered silks and satins, veils and ostrich-plumes, scarfs and frills, and all the elegancies of a fashionable lady's toilet: but his fingers came not in contact with the object of his search. Suddenly a noise like that of a door opening, met his ear; and the thought flashed to him that Lucilla's cry had alarmed the other domestics, who were coming to *reconnoitre*. But the sound ceased; and he therefore concluded that the creaking of the door arose from its being moved by the draught in the passage.

"If you can't find what you want," said Chiffin, who began to comprehend his lordship's difficulty, "strike a light—and I'll take precious good care to keep this woman's face covered over."

"Do anything—but spare my life!" moaned the terrified Lucilla.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," answered the Cannibal. "I dare say you are uncommon pretty—and I won't harm a hair of your head, if so be you keep quiet."

Lord Harold, without making any reply to Chiffin's suggestion—for he did not again choose to risk the recognition of his voice on Lucilla's part—nevertheless hastened to follow the advice given. Striking a match, he lighted one of the wax-candles—threw a glance towards the bed—and perceived that Chiffin was faithfully fulfilling his promise by keeping the girl's countenance covered up by the clothes. Staunton prosecuted his search by means of the light; and in a few moments was successful. Then he extinguished the taper; and the Cannibal knew thereby that the work, whatever it was, had been thus far achieved.

"Now, my dear," he said to Lucilla, "you'll have the kindness to keep as quiet here as you possibly can for the next hour. We have some more business to do somewhere else in the Castle; and I shall be standing outside in the passage to make sure that all is quiet. If so be you give an alarm or make the least attempt to do it, I shall rush in upon you, and——"

"I won't—I won't!" said the still frightened Lucilla, the terrible apprehension seizing upon her that the ruffian, in order to make more sure, might on second thoughts deal her a death-blow at once.

The Cannibal and Lord Harold issued forth from the room together, and speedily retraced their way towards the chapel.

"There is not a moment to be lost," said Staunton, on gaining the door of the tapestry-chamber: "we must depart at once. But what did you mean by having a little more business——"

"Couldn't you understand?" exclaimed the Cannibal, with a chuckling laugh. "It was only a dodge on my part to make the girl keep quiet, thinking that I am still posted outside her door. Just let me get my boots, my lord—and I'll be with you."

Staunton at once proceeded to open the window in the tapestry-chamber, against which the convenient branch of the tree upreared itself. He speedily descended; and wading knee-deep through the water—for the river was somewhat swollen at the time—at length reached the bank at the north-western angle of the Castle. There, in about two minutes, he was joined by Chiffin.

"Is all quiet within?" was Staunton's immediate and hurried question.

"Yes—all quiet. That girl seems to have kept her word."

"Then let us proceed to some little distance hence," said Harold, "where we may make final arrangements, and then separate."

"Good!" answered the Cannibal: and they continued their way in silence along the bank of the river.

But now, as Staunton felt in the breast-pocket of his surtout coat for his handkerchief, he discovered that it was missing. He searched in all his other pockets—but without avail: he looked likewise in his hat—it was not there—the handkerchief was gone! Now, he perfectly remembered having used it when first making his stealthy entry into the Castle: for the leaves of the tree up which he had clambered, were covered with dew—and on stepping into the tapestry-room, he had wiped the moisture from his face. He had therefore dropped the handkerchief somewhere within the Castle—or else it had come out in the tree while he was making his descent. He stopped short suddenly—for the incident troubled him, inasmuch as his initials and crest were worked in the corner of that cambric handkerchief.

"What's the matter?" asked Chiffin, as the young nobleman thus came to a dead halt.

The loss was immediately explained.

"Well, you must leave it to chance, my lord," at once replied the Cannibal: "for perhaps by this time the household of the Castle is alarmed. And look!—it is so——By heaven, lights are moving about!"

Harold threw a rapid glance back towards the building, and perceived that Chiffin had spoken nothing but the truth. He therefore hurried onward, much annoyed and sorely troubled at the two circumstances which might serve as a clue to the discovery that he was one of the individuals who had made this mysterious and burglarious visit in the dead of night to Saxondale Castle. The first of those circumstances was that his voice had probably been recognised by Lucilla: the other was the loss of the handkerchief.

CHAPTER CXXI.

THE INVESTIGATION.

LUCILLA, as the reader has seen, had remained behind at the Castle instead of accompanying Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the Continent. This may be explained by stating that her ladyship and daughter had proceeded alone to France; for they could not bear the idea of taking with them any of the domestics who were so well acquainted with all that had occurred on the memorable day fixed for the double wedding. Now, Lucilla had a great idea of comfort; and she saw no reason why she should not occupy her ladyship's chamber during her absence. But firmly believing that the Castle was haunted, she was in the habit of locking herself in at night and placing the key under her pillow;—although we ourselves are unable to explain by what process of metaphysical reasoning she could have arrived at the conclusion that this would prove an effectual barrier against the intrusion of evil spirits.

As the reader may suppose, the poor girl was dreadfully frightened at the sudden bursting-in of the door: but she had kept as quiet as possible under the intimidation of Chiffin the Cannibal. After he and Lord Harold had taken their departure, she lay still for some minutes, until the thought gradually began to steal into her mind that the ruffian's assurance of remaining posted in the passage for the next hour, was merely a menace uttered in the hope of preventing her from giving an alarm. As her courage returned, this interpretation of the Cannibal's threat grew more feasible in appearance; and summoning all her fortitude to her aid, Lucilla got out of bed. Stealthily approaching the door, she listened with suspended breath. Not a sound met her ears: she pulled the door a little farther open: again she listened—and still hearing nothing, she peeped forth. The moonlight was powerful in the passage; and if any person had been there, she must have seen him, unless concealed in one of the doorways. But as no movement was made when the chamber door itself had creaked somewhat on her opening it, she was convinced that the coast was clear. Then she hastened to huddle on a few clothes; and speeding to the steward's room, knocked at the door. From within this functionary, being startled by the sound, demanded who it was, and what was the matter?

"There are people in the Castle," cried Lucilla: "they threatened to murder me if I gave an alarm!"

These words were caught by several of the other servants occupying adjacent rooms opening from the same passage as the steward's; and in a few minutes the entire household was aroused. Candles were lighted—the domestics, male and female, springing from their beds, hastened to put on some clothing—and Lucilla was speedily surrounded by numerous anxious faces whose looks denoted mingled curiosity and alarm.

Her tale was soon told. She had been aroused by the breaking in of the door—she had screamed out—a ruffian with a dreadful ferocious voice had menaced her with his vengeance if she did not remain tranquil—and while, under the influence of his dreadful threats, she desisted from any farther attempt to raise an alarm, the person who accompanied him proceeded to ransack her ladyship's cupboard.

"But you will never guess," added Lucilla, who was listened to with breathless attention mingled with excited suspense,—"you will never guess, I say, who that other person was."

"Who?" demanded numerous voices.

"Lord Harold Staunton," was the reply.

Ejaculations of astonishment burst forth; and the male domestics, being thus convinced that the disturbers of this particular night were at all events no ghosts or evil spirits, and that moreover they appeared to be only two in number, grew marvellously brave, and with common consent vowed to search the premises throughout in the hope of taking them captive. The first move was made towards the western side of the Castle: the tapestry-rooms were examined—and the marks of footsteps, wet and clayey, were distinctly traced to the window of that particular apartment by which Lord

Harold's entry, as well as his subsequent egress in company with the Cannibal, had been effected.

"The tree!" ejaculated several voices—thus at once indicating the general conjecture as to the means by which the intruders had entered.

The window was thrown up; and the full blaze of lamps and candles being poured upon the tree, the disturbed and ruffled state of the foliage proved the accuracy of the suspicion.

"Ah! what is that?" exclaimed the steward, who was foremost. "Something white——'tis a handkerchief! Stay—hold my candle while I climb out and reach it."

This was speedily done: the handkerchief was examined, and in the corner were discovered the initials and the crest of Lord Harold Staunton. Thus Lucilla's statement, if any doubt had previously existed in respect to its accuracy, was fully confirmed.

"Let us go through the rooms at once," said the steward, "and see if any other parts of the Castle have been visited."

By his directions the body of domestics broke up into three or four different detachments; and a general search commenced. It was therefore when the lights were moving about on the northern side of the building, that they were seen by Chiffin and Lord Harold as they were pursuing their way along the river's bank in the direction of Gainsborough. After a thorough examination of the premises, the detached bodies of domestics all re-assembled in the great hall; and adjourning into the banquetting-room, they held a conference as to the course that ought to be adopted. The result was that, as they had been left in charge of the Castle, it was their duty, irrespective of all other considerations, to make the circumstances and discoveries of this night known to some justice of the peace. At first the name of Mr. Hawkshaw was suggested: but when it was remarked that after what had taken place between himself and Miss Farefield, it would perhaps be indecent to appeal to him in the present matter, or in any way mix him up with the affairs of the Castle, it was decided that Mr. Denison should be the magistrate invited to take cognizance of the affair. The steward accordingly wrote a letter, which he gave to a groom, with instructions to set off at seven o'clock in the morning to Mr. Denison's mansion. This being done, and it being now considerably past midnight, the conference broke up; and the domestics dispersed to their respective chambers, —Lucilla removing to the one which was specially her own.

The groom who was charged with the letter, set off in the morning but on arriving at Mr. Denison's, he learnt that this gentleman was passing a few days at Hawkshaw Hall. He accordingly mounted his horse again, and rode onward to the Squire's abode. On reaching the Hall, he found Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison walking together upon the lawn in front of the edifice; and he gave the letter into the hands of the latter, who, when he had read it, passed it to Hawkshaw, and then began asking several questions. The groom explained all that had taken place,—thus adding minute details to the rapidly-sketched outline which the steward's letter contained.

"This is most extraordinary," observed Mr. Denison, addressing the remark to the Squire: then turning to the groom, he said, "You can ride back to the Castle: I will follow immediately."

"It is indeed extraordinary," exclaimed Mr. Hawkshaw when the man had taken his departure. "There is some strange mystery in all this. That Lord Harold made his entry for the sake of actual plunder, cannot be supposed for a moment. Might it not be to possess himself of some documents or correspondence in Lady Saxondale's possession?"

"As I am appealed to in my capacity of a magistrate," answered Denison, "I am resolved to investigate the matter thoroughly. But as the transaction is shrouded with all the mystery to which you have alluded, it will be well to conduct the inquiry with as much secrecy as possible. Besides, it is one in which more than a single magistrate should be engaged. You must accompany me, Hawkshaw."

"Would it not be indiscreet," asked the Squire, "for me to meddle any more in the affairs of the Saxondale family?"

"Indiscreet?—nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Denison. "You must do your duty as a magistrate. Here is a case in which a downright burglarious entrance is effected in a particular dwelling; and for the sake of the servants themselves, the matter must be thoroughly sifted. Come—let us ride over to the Castle together."

Orders were accordingly given to get a couple of horses in readiness; and the two gentlemen lost no time in repairing to Saxondale Castle. They went alone together, unattended by any domestics, so as to prevent the gossip of one set of servants with another from spreading the affair throughout the neighbourhood.

On arriving at the Castle, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw were conducted to the library, where they took their seats and proceeded to hear the evidence to be brought before them. Lucilla was first examined; and she deposed to the facts already known to the reader,—observing that she distinctly heard and recognised the voice of Lord Harold Staunton when he enjoined his accomplice not to do her a mischief.

"And have you examined the cupboard which was ransacked?" asked Mr. Denison.

"No, sir," she replied: "for Lord Harold Staunton locked it again, and took away the key with which he had opened it."

"To your recollection," proceeded Mr. Denison, "did the key seem to turn easily in the lock, as if it were the one properly fitting it? or was there any difficulty, and was violence used?"

"I was very much frightened and bewildered at the time," responded the young woman; "but as far as I can recollect, the key appeared to open the cupboard instantaneously."

"Could it possibly be," whispered Hawkshaw to Mr. Denison, "that her ladyship entrusted Lord Harold with that key for a particular purpose? But no!—such an idea is scarcely credible: she would not instruct a person to break into her own dwelling, when she might give a messenger the proper authority to search anywhere for what she wanted."

"It is very mysterious," observed Mr. Denison.

Lucilla, having signed her deposition, which the gentleman carefully took down, was succeeded as a witness by the steward, who deposed to the discovery of the handkerchief, which he produced.

The cook then stated that for some little time past

she had noticed that provisions had disappeared from the larder during the night-time in an unusual way—but that thinking some of the other servants might have paid the place a visit at irregular hours, she had never mentioned the circumstance until the incidents of the preceding night had forcibly reminded her of it; and that when she mentioned it, all the domestics were unanimous in declaring that they had never visited the larder or pantry without the knowledge of the cook or butler.

"From this circumstance the inference would be," said Mr. Denison, "that some one has either been secreted in the Castle, or else has paid very frequent visits to its interior in a stealthy manner."

The steward now produced a tobacco-pipe, which had been found during the search of the past night, in the cloister opening from the chapel: but this was held by the magistrates as scarcely to prove the fact of any one having been secreted in the Castle, inasmuch as the pipe might have been accidentally left in the cloister by the individual who accompanied Lord Harold. The servants then proceeded to inform Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw of the belief which had become almost general amongst the household, that the western part of the building was either haunted by evil spirits or was occasionally visited by ill-disposed persons:—lights had often been seen there; and on the night preceding the departure of Lady Saxondale and Juliana, very extraordinary things had taken place. A great light had been seen to shoot from one of the windows of the tapestry-rooms; and that same room was subsequently found in the utmost disorder, a large portion of the tapestry being destroyed. There was another incident that was now mentioned: namely, that about a fortnight back the door of that very room, which Lady Saxondale had herself locked on the night alluded to, was found to be burst open.

"All these circumstances," said Mr. Denison, "certainly tend to prove that some evil-intentioned person or persons have at different times obtained admittance to the Castle."

But there was yet another incident to be mentioned: and this was the occurrence which had first tended to create the belief that the western part of the building was haunted. That occurrence, it will be remembered, took place on the very day preceding the arrival of Lady Saxondale and Juliana at the Castle, when they left London at the time of the flight of Constance with the Marquis of Villebelle. Robert, one of the footmen, now repeated to Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw what had then happened—how on going into the chapel to open the windows there, he saw that the door of the vestiary which he had noticed to be open a few minutes before, had suddenly and mysteriously become closed. He farther stated that when returning to the chapel some hours later on the same day, he had seen a shape glide into the vestiary. On this occasion he was accompanied by two or three other servants, who likewise saw the same shape; and these individuals now corroborated Robert's story.

Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw, having listened to all those various statements, proceeded to examine the premises. In the first place they repaired to Lady Saxondale's chamber, which had been forcibly entered: they saw that the door was burst open—they found the cupboard locked, and without the slightest scratch or mark of violence near the key-hole: so that it would appear as if Lucilla's impression, that the key used by Lord Harold had acted easily and immediately, was strictly correct. From this room they proceeded to the tapestry-apartment, the door of which likewise was found to have been burst open, in corroboration of the statement of the domestics who had found it so a fortnight back. They opened the window—carefully examined the tree outside—and discovered unmistakable marks to prove that it had been used as a means of ingress and egress with regard to that window. Entering the chapel and the cloister, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw, accompanied by some of the upper servants, instituted the minutest search; and in which one of the tombs they found a piece of bread not many days old. There were moreover half-a-dozen different places where the ashes from a tobacco-pipe had evidently been knocked out;—and thus the general impression seemed to be fully confirmed, that some one had been secreted in this part of the building.

Having finished their survey, Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison returned to the library, where they consulted alone together.

"What course do you purpose to pursue?" asked the Squire.

"The mystery is so great," replied Mr. Denison, "that it cannot be dealt with by ordinary means—such as the issuing a warrant for the apprehension of Lord Harold Staunton and his accomplice, if the latter could be known and found. Because it is just probable—though, as you yourself said, barely so—that Lady Saxondale herself may not be entirely a stranger to the proceeding. Besides, Staunton is the nephew of our friend Eagledean; and I should be sorry to take any step that would annoy the Marquis. One thing is very certain—which is that the Marquis believes his nephew to be upon the Continent: for this he communicated to me in a letter which I received from him the other day."

"Is it not possible that Lady Saxondale, though reputed to be in Ireland," said Mr. Hawkshaw, "is herself on the Continent, and that she may have fallen in with Lord Harold?"

"It may be so," responded Mr. Denison: then after a pause, he observed, "Do you know, Hawkshaw, that it has often struck me there was something very strange and mysterious in the connexion of Lord Harold Staunton and Lady Saxondale—much more so than even his uncle the Marquis suspected."

"Ah!" ejaculated the Squire: "that same idea has occurred to me also. Do you not think the better plan would be, in respect to present circumstances, to enjoin the domestics generally to keep the incidents of the past night a profound secret, and for us to communicate at once with the Marquis of Eagledean, who by his authority over his nephew, may discover and frustrate anything wrong that is going on."

"Such," answered Mr. Denison, "is the very course I should have suggested; and I am glad that you coincide with my views. As for writing to Lady Saxondale, it is out of the question."

"I have received a pressing invitation from Lord Eagledean and his son Francis, to visit them at Edenbridge Park in Kent, where they are at present: and if you concur in my proposal," added

Mr. Hawkshaw, "I will set off without delay and report everything to the Marquis."

"Be it so," responded Mr. Denison. "To you be this duty allotted. When will you depart?"

"This very day," answered the Squire,—"the moment, indeed, I get back to the Hall."

The arrangement being thus made, the steward, the butler, and Lucilla, were summoned into the presence of the magistrates, and were enjoined by them to keep secret the occurrences of the previous night, and to request their fellow-servants to be equally silent on the matter. Faithful promises to that effect were given,—whereupon Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw took their departure from Saxondale Castle.

CHAPTER CXXII.

EDENBRIDGE PARK.

Between Edenbridge and Tonbridge, in one of the most beautiful parts of Kent, and at a distance of about seven-and-twenty miles from London, was situated the principal estate in possession of the Marquis of Eagledean. The mansion was one of those huge red-brick piles which sprang up in the time of Queen Elizabeth, and are characterized by the particular style of architecture belonging to that age. During the long absence of the Marquis on the Continent, the edifice had been left in the charge of a few old dependants of the family, and the estate to the care of a faithful steward. Thus, though for many years unvisited by their noble owner, both the mansion and lands had been kept in excellent order; and when, about a fortnight previous to the exact date of which we are writing, the Marquis determined to remove with his family from his recently acquired property at Stamford Hill, to Edenbridge Park, everthing was soon in readiness for their reception. The necessary complement of domestics was speedily made up; and, with the promptitude which characterized all his lordship's proceedings, immense quantities of new furniture, as well as other embellishments and decorations, were sent down from London.

It would be impossible to conceive a more perfect paradise than this estate of the Marquis of Eagledean. Near the house there were large pieces of ornamental water, on which floated many stately swans; and in the immense park numerous herds of deer might be seen browsing on the sweet grass. The flower-gardens were admirably laid out, and contained several conservatories filled with the rarest plants: the fruit-gardens were spacious; and in this autumnal season of which we are now writing, the boughs were laden with their clustering gems. A crystal streamlet meandered through the verdant meadows where the cattle grazed, the sheep fed, and horses frisked about. The estate, consisting of many acres, was dotted with numerous little groves and coppices: its lanes afforded beautiful rides—its fields delicious walks; and altogether it was a spot in every sense calculated to enchant the eye during the genial season of the year—while the spacious mansion afforded every luxury and comfort suitable for all seasons.

It was here, then, that the Marquis of Eagledean had for the present taken up his abode, with his wife, Lord Everton, and his own two children. We may observe that Lord Everton was completely restored to health, both mental and physical; and that he had succeeded, without farther opposition on the part of his unnatural uncle, to the title and estates from the enjoyment of which he had so long been cruelly debarred. His engagement with Henrietta Leyden, already sanctioned by the Marquis of Eagledean when passing under the *incognito* of Mr. Gunthorpe, had received the full concurrence of his mother: and it was arranged that the nuptials should take place at the ensuing Christmas season. Adolphus would have been much saddened at parting with his Henrietta when leaving Stamford Hill for Edenbridge Park, were it not understood that Mrs. Leyden, her daughter, and little Charley were to follow in the course of a week and pass some time at the same place. Count Christoval had been acknowledged and recognised as Elizabeth Paton's intended husband; and he had gone back to Spain, in order to make certain arrangements with respect to his own extensive estates and other possessions previous to the celebration of the bridal. Under these circumstances it was, therefore, indifferent to Elizabeth whether she resided for the present at Stamford Hill or at Edenbridge Park. But there was one to whom the removal was really painful, although he did the best to conceal his feelings: and this was Frank Paton. For he had conceived a growing affection towards the beauteous Angela Deveril: his heart had taught him that the emotions he had experienced towards Juliana were not those of a veritable attachment, and that the love he now cherished in respect to Angela, was of a very different quality. William Deveril and his sister had been invited, as well as the Leydens, to visit Edenbridge Park: but their coming was by no means to be so soon calculated upon as that of the latter; for Madge Somers still remained exceedingly ill at their villa near the Regent's Park, and they had resolved not to leave her so long as she lingered in this state. In that determination they were influenced, not merely by their sense of duty towards a fellow-creature, but likewise because they felt persuaded that her life was a most precious one in respect to themselves—or at least to William Deveril—inasmuch as the important revelation she had to make was as yet untold; and if she were to die ere it was made known, the secret would in all probability perish with her. Thus was it that they surrounded her with all possible attentions—watched over her as if she were a near and dear relative of their own—and awaited with much painful anxiety and suspense the time when her intellect should cease to wander, when her reasoning faculties should be settled, and when her power of speech should be restored.

One morning Francis Paton was walking alone in a grove of evergreens at no great distance from the mansion, when he heard footsteps approaching somewhat rapidly from behind; and looking back, he saw that it was his father who was coming to overtake him. He turned and joined his sire, who took his arm,—saying, "Frank, my dear boy, I wish to have some little private conversation with you."

The youth coloured up to the eyes: for the conviction struck him that the Marquis was about to speak on the topic nearest his heart—and the idea

that a love-secret is penetrated by those who have authority to pronounce an opinion in the matter, is invariably fraught with confusion on the part of the young. Besides, Frank had not ventured to breathe to his parents this secret of his love, for fear lest they might think him volatile and whimsical in thus conceiving a new passion so soon after his hope of espousing Juliana Farefield had been destroyed.

"Frank," continued the Marquis of Eagledean, as they walked slowly together along the verdant embowering avenue, "there is something upon your mind: you are not altogether happy. Before we left Stamford Manor you were gay and cheerful—but during the fortnight we have been at the Park, I have noticed that a change has come over you. Tell me what it is. You know that in me you possess an indulgent parent, and that your mother is the same."

Frank made no answer: he wished to confess the truth—but he could not find appropriate words wherein to frame it.

"I see," said the Marquis, with a half-smile upon his countenance, "that I must guess for myself. The truth is, Frank, you have not beheld with indifference the beautiful and amiable sister of my young friend William Deveril."

"Oh, my dear father!" exclaimed Frank, the colour now literally glowing upon his cheeks: "what will you think of me? Must you not deem me changeable—eccentric to a degree—foolishly susceptible——"

"What, in respect to one who is every way so worthy of your esteem and love!" cried the Marquis. "No, my dear boy," he went on to say, perceiving that the sunniest joy was now dancing in the youth's eyes; "I shall not judge you thus harshly. All along I have in reality comprehended your secret: I have seen you happy and gay in Angela's society—I have studied your feelings in her presence—I fathomed what was passing in your soul. But I said nothing—nor did your mother: we wished to put your heart to a fair trial. Indeed, I should not have mentioned the circumstance to you at so early a stage, were it not that it pained me to see you thus falling into despondency since your arrival at the Park. But cheer up, my dear Frank—for I can tell you that you are not altogether indifferent to Angela herself"

Nothing could exceed the rapture with which the youth heard this announcement; and his joy testified itself in the liveliest manner.

"Yes—make yourself happy," continued the Marquis:—"for if at the expiration of a few months you still feel the same interest in Angela, you will have my free permission to avow your attachment. I am in hopes that in three or four weeks' time Mr. Deveril and his sister will be enabled to join us here; and then you will have still farther opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of that pure-minded and excellent young lady."

Having thus spoken, the Marquis wrung the hand of his son with the warmest demonstration of affection; and turning away, left him to ponder joyfully upon the scene which had just taken place, and which though so brief, had nevertheless infused unspeakable happiness into the youth's soul.

As the Marquis of Eagledean was retracing his way towards the mansion, he was met by a liveryservant, who announced that Mr. Hawkshaw had just arrived. His lordship hastened on to the house; and proceeding to the apartment to which the Squire had been already shown, gave him the most cordial greeting. He proposed at once to conduct him into the presence of the Marchioness, and introduce him to her ladyship: but Mr. Hawkshaw said that he had not merely come on a visit of pleasure, but likewise on one of business, and that he would seize that immediate opportunity of acquitting himself of the latter. The Marquis now perceived, by the Squire's countenance, that he had evidently something of importance to communicate;—and he prepared to listen. Mr. Hawkshaw then related all those circumstances which had occurred at Saxondale Castle, and which are known to the reader.

"But what is more," added Mr. Hawkshaw, "I was determined, while passing through London, to ascertain if possible where Lady Saxondale is. I accordingly repaired yesterday to Saxondale House in Park Lane, and inquired for her ladyship,—assuming ignorance of the fact that she was not at home. To my astonishment I was asked which Lady Saxondale I meant?—and on giving the proper answer, learnt that Lord Saxondale, the son, had within the last few days married a certain Baroness de Charlemont——"

"The Baroness de Charlemont!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean. "What! the woman who was tried for the murder of her husband? I remember reading the whole case in the foreign newspapers about a couple of years back."

"Indeed!" said Hawkshaw, as much surprised as the Marquis had just been: "this is perfectly new to me: I never heard of it before. But it accounts for the strange look which the domestic wore when speaking to me at Saxondale House."

"The infatuated madman!" cried the Marquis; "to think that he could have committed such an egregious folly! But let us not suffer his proceedings to divert our attention from the more important topic which was ere now engaging it. Did you succeed in learning where the Dowager Lady Saxondale is at present?"

"Yes," responded Hawkshaw; "I pretended to have urgent motives for ascertaining the fact, inasmuch as I saw a certain unwillingness on the domestic's part to inform me. I said that I came from Lincolnshire expressly to see her ladyship, and that it was peremptory I should know how soon a letter would reach her. Then the man let out that she was in France, with her daughter the Hon. Miss Farefield."

As the Squire mentioned this last name, a dark cloud gathered upon his countenance; for though he had been terribly avenged upon Juliana, yet he could never think of her without a recurrence of that feeling of hate which had succeeded his once passionate love.

"And Lady Saxondale is in France," said the Marquis. "Oh, fatal mistake on my part to send Harold travelling by himself upon the Continent! Much better to have kept him somewhere under my own eye in England! But the mischief is done, and cannot be recalled. Yes—there cannot be a doubt of it: he has seen Lady Saxondale—and there is some new plot now hatching. But its nature defies all conjecture. I know not what course to

adopt. Where shall I seek for my nephew?—and even if I found him, what regard would he now pay to my authority, after having so flagrantly and deliberately violated it by coming back to England?"

For some minutes the Marquis of Eagledean remained wrapped up in thought; and Mr. Hawkshaw did not break upon his silence—for he had nothing to suggest.

"It will be better," said the Marquis, after a long pause, "not to mention for the present these circumstances to any other person beneath this roof. It would only distress them to know that I experienced fresh troubles in regard to my graceless nephew. In whatsoever course that is to be adopted, I must be governed by circumstances; and as you, my dear Hawkshaw, are now to be my guest here for a while, we shall find opportunities to consult together. Come," added the Marquis, more cheerfully, "let me introduce you to her ladyship. You will likewise find her son Lord Everton with her in the drawing-room. Our Frank, to whom you were so kind in Lincolnshire, is walking in the grounds, but will be in shortly;—and our Elizabeth, to whom you have yet to be introduced, has gone to Tonbridge to visit a poor family whose distress accidentally reached our knowledge."

But while Mr. Hawkshaw is being presented to the Marchioness of Eagledean and Adolphus, and also renewing his acquaintance with Frank, we will direct the reader's attention to a little adventure which Elizabeth Paton experienced at the same time in the vicinage of Tonbridge.

Having been driven over in the carriage, shortly after breakfast on the day of which we are speaking, she ordered the equipage to be put up at the principal hotel in the place, as she had not only to visit the poor family of whom her father had spoken to Mr. Hawkshaw, but likewise to make a few purchases for her mother and herself. The cottage where the

distressed family dwelt, was about a mile out of the town; and having ascertained its precise whereabouts, Elizabeth set forth to walk thither. The case may be described in a few words. A labouring man, remarkable for the excellence of his character, had suddenly met his death by some shocking accident, leaving a wife and large family of children totally unprovided for; while an unfeeling landlord had actually put a seizure upon the little furniture immediately after the funeral was over. Some trifling subscription had been made by a few of the humane portion of the inhabitants of Tonbridge; but the sum was barely sufficient to meet pressing emergencies—while the poor woman and her large family had nothing to ensure them against want for the future. Such was the case which having by accident reached the ears of the Marquis of Eagledean, he had purposely sent his daughter Elizabeth to relieve: for he loved to make her as much as possible his almoner, so that by every good deed she accomplished, she might feel that she was making atonement for the errors of her own past life.

It was with no niggard hand that the bounty of the Marquis was dispensed on this as on all other occasions, through the medium of his daughter; and she had the satisfaction of relieving the poor widow's mind from all care for the future. She quitted the cottage, followed by the blessings of those she left behind—and began to retrace her way to the town. Her path lay through the fields—and in one place along a high hedge, out of which numerous tall trees sprang up. It was a beautiful but a lonely spot; and as the day, though at the beginning of October, was exceedingly warm, with a bright sun shining,—the trees, glowing with their rich autumnal tints, furnished a grateful shade. As Elizabeth Paton was continuing her way, she noticed a man seated under a tree at a little distance ahead, and smoking a pipe. She thought nothing of it until she approached nearer—when an ejaculation of surprise burst from his lips; and as he started up, the ferocious and never-to-be-forgotten countenance of Chiffin the Cannibal was revealed to her view.

She recoiled with ineffable horror from the presence of that wretch whose hands she knew to be stained with gore. She had never seen him since the murder in the barge; and that murder she knew at the time he had committed: for the reader will remember how she expressed herself to Solomon Patch with disgust and aversion upon the subject. But if she had not seen Chiffin since then, she had read of him; and the newspapers had informed her of another deed of blood that he had committed—namely, the assassination of that same Solomon Patch and his wife. No wonder therefore that Elizabeth Paton should recoil from his presence when he thus suddenly started up before her, as if it were a hideous reptile springing at her from the hedge in the shade of which he had been seated. But Chiffin mistook that abrupt movement on her part as indicative only of astonishment at thus falling in with him: for he could not suppose that one who had played the part of a daring highway-woman, could be very nice as to her sentiments in respect to the deeper and darker crimes which he had committed. Besides, he was totally ignorant of the fact that she was the Marquis of Eagledean's daughter: he had no idea of the great change which had taken place in her position: and when he thus beheld her handsomely attired, it excited no suspicion of the sort, inasmuch as she had always been wont to dress with elegance.

"What, Lady Bess!" he exclaimed, a grim smile of satisfaction appearing upon his villanous countenance. "Who the deuce would have expected to see you here? You look like one just dropped from the clouds. It's quite a pleasure, I declare, to fall in with an old acquaintance in this manner! Why, I really don't think you and me have ever met since that business at Hornsey—at Beech Tree Lodge, you know"

While the Cannibal was thus speaking, Elizabeth Paton had time to collect her ideas. The conviction instantaneously struck her that it would be the height of imprudence to make an enemy of Chiffin. He knew too much of her antecedents when she was pursuing her criminal though wildly romantic career, for her to feel herself sufficiently strong in her own new position to provoke him. He might travel out of his way to do her a mischief; and as for her taking any step to surrender him up to justice, it was for the same reasons altogether out of the question. Painfully humiliating, and fraught with a poignant remorse, were these reflections for the Marquis of Eagledean's daughter, as they flashed through her mind: but nevertheless she was compelled to endure them—and they were moreover suggestive of that prudential course which she found it necessary to pursue towards the Cannibal. We need scarcely add that it never for an instant entered her mind to tell him of that change in her circumstances to which we have alluded: for such a proceeding, by proclaiming herself to be well off, would only lay her open to his cupidity and extortions.

"And what are you doing here?" she asked, conquering her repugnance so far as to speak without betraying the horror she felt at his presence.

"Oh! the usual thing—a little business in hand, you may very well guess," he replied with another grin.

"But this is rather a singular neighbourhood as a field for your exploits—is it not?" inquired Elizabeth, who felt, she knew not why, a growing curiosity to discover what had brought the Cannibal to the vicinage of Tonbridge.

"Why, you see I've got a good job in hand—and a deuced good employer too," responded Chiffin. "And that's not all either: for there's a little bit of personal feeling in the matter. But I suppose you've heard of my exploits lately—hav'n't you?"—and now his features assumed an expression of grim and hideous significancy.

"I have heard so much," replied Miss Paton, with an inward shudder, but with perfect outward calmness, "that I am surprised you trust yourself abroad like this in the day-light."

"Who the deuce would recognise me down here? Howsumever, as I was saying, I suppose you've heard of that business about Madge Somers—and that t'other business in Agar Town? I understand Madge Somers is in a fair way to recover: but those chaps, Deveril and old Gunthorpe—or the Marquis of Eagledean, as I now understand he is—gave information to the police about Madge's business; and it was that which made me keep out of the way at the time I thought of doing t'other affair in Agar Town."

Elizabeth Paton had kept her countenance admirably when her own father's name was mentioned by the Cannibal: but she naturally felt still more curious than at first to learn what had brought him into this neighbourhood; and the suspicion had all in an instant flashed to her mind, in consequence of what he said about a personal feeling in the business he had in hand, that it might possibly be connected with the Marquis.

"So you see, Lady Bess," resumed the ruffian, not for an instant apprehending that he was talking to one whose mode of life had entirely changed; for Lord Harold himself was ignorant of Elizabeth Paton's antecedents, and therefore had said nothing on the subject to the Cannibal,—"you see that I owe that old Gunthorpe a turn for blabbing to the police about me; and now I am likely to have satisfaction. But you hav'n't yet told me what *you* are doing in these parts."

"The fact is," answered Elizabeth, "I have got nothing to do, Chiffin. I came down here a few days back in the hope of doing a certain thing; and so I took quiet lodgings in the town—dressed myself out smart—and no doubt pass as a very respectable lady: but all the while I was making secret inquiries to help me in the business I had in hand. And now that I have got all the information I wanted, the fellows I told to come down and join me here, have not made their appearance; and I have learnt that they are in trouble, and not likely to come. The consequence is, I have got no one to help me in this little affair: and I cannot possibly do it alone."

"Can't I help you?" demanded Chiffin. "The business I have come about, I dare say will be over to-night——But then, though, when I come to think of it," he added seriously, "I shall have to cut and run immediately after; and so it's no use talking. And yet," he went on to say, still thoughtfully, "my business may *not* come off to-night: for it all depends on some inquiry which my employer has got to make in a certain quarter: so you may just as well tell me what you thought of doing, and I'll see if I can help you. But is it pretty safe? and is there much to be got by it? Don't let it turn out as that affair with the two lawyers did, when you got so nicely took."

"On the contrary," responded Elizabeth Paton, "it is quite safe—and there is plenty to be got by it. You have already mentioned a name which I had uppermost in my own mind——"

"What's that?" asked the Cannibal quickly. "Eagledean's?"

"Just so," rejoined Elizabeth.

"The deuce it is!" ejaculated Chiffin. "Well, this is odd! Then I suppose you meant a crack at the Park?"

"That is precisely what I did mean. The Marquis has a mint of money with him, and always keeps it in his room at night."

"A mint of money?" echoed the Cannibal, his eyes sparkling with reptile-like glare at the information. "But what sort of inquiries have you made?"

"All that are necessary," answered Elizabeth Paton: "and what is more, one of the female-servants at Edenbridge Park is in league with me. But of course she and I couldn't do it alone; the Marquis might awake—an alarm might be raised——"

"I understand all about it," interrupted Chiffin: "you must have some sturdy resolute chap who would knock him on the head in a minute. Well, I'm your man."

"Indeed! you will undertake it?" cried Elizabeth, affecting to be much rejoiced, while she inwardly shuddered at the murderous way in which the ruffian had alluded to her father.

"To be sure!" rejoined Chiffin; "and what's more, I shall be able to do two jobs in one. Well, the longer I think of it, the more odd seems this coincidence, as your learned folks would call it. Why, what do you think, Lady Bess? *My* business is also at the Park."

"Then some one that I had spoken to on the subject, must have given you the idea, without mentioning how he himself got it?"—and Elizabeth Paton affected indignation at this feigned betrayal of a scheme altogether imaginary: for the reader will very well comprehend that the purport of all she was saying was merely to draw the Cannibal out.

"No, nothing of the sort," he responded. "None of your pals has nosed upon you: 'cos why, I hav'n't seen any such fellers for a long time past. It's a coincidence, as I just now said, and that's all."

"Then *you* also meant a burglary at the Park?" observed Elizabeth inquiringly.

"Summut more than that. I meant to put old Gunthorpe—Eagledean I mean—out of the way; and deuced well I am to be paid for it too. Why, what do you think? I have been hiding in Saxondale Castle, all the way down in Lincolnshire, for some weeks past: and the chap that wanted me to knock old Eagledean off the hooks, came and found me out on purpose. So you see what a necessary sort of blade I am to some folks."

"Indeed you must be!" responded Elizabeth. "But who is this person that thus sought you out?"

"Well, I don't know that I need exactly tell that," replied Chiffin: "'cos why, it's nothing to our present purpose."

"Oh, of course not!" quickly exclaimed the lady, not choosing to appear too curious, for fear of exciting the Cannibal's suspicions.

We pause a moment to state the real reason why Chiffin would not be explicit on that point to Elizabeth Paton. It was not that he mistrusted her, or that he had the slightest misgiving as to the truth of all she was saying: but it was because he calculated that if, by means of murder, Lord Harold Staunton should become Marquis of Eagledean, he (Chiffin) would have a constant hold upon him. The possession of that tremendous secret would enable him—even from America, whither he purposed to betake himself—to make incessant drains upon the young nobleman's purse; and he did not choose any other person, by the knowledge of the same secret, to have a share in that prospective system of extortion.

"Well," he resumed, "suppose you and me, Lady Bess, club together in this business? The fact is that you can supply the very information my employer is now endeavouring to get at."

"And what is that?" inquired Elizabeth.

"The room where old Eagledean sleeps at the Park. Once let me know *that*, and I would be bound to get in. But if so be you know it already

—as of course you do, since you have got a friend inside the premises—the whole thing can be managed as comfortable as possible; and you and me can share a jolly lot of swag."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Nothing will suit me better than to have such a companion as you in this business."

"And now about the arrangements, then?" said the Cannibal.

"They can be settled in a few minutes," answered Elizabeth: then drawing forth a letter from her reticule, she tore off a blank page; and with a pencil, which she likewise had at hand, prepared to make a sketch to suit her own views. "Lend me your hat, Chiffin," she said, "that I may convert it into a table."

The ruffian gave her his hat; and sitting on the bank by his side, she placed the paper upon the crown, and commenced her sketch, explaining the meaning of the details as she went on.

"This is the front of the house, you see; and here is the portico of the entrance. The top of it is level with the first-floor windows. One of the windows, you perceive, looks upon that portico, which is flat at the top. The window belongs to a small room which is unoccupied. A rope may be thrown out—you could climb up it—and so get on the top of the portico."

"But how's the rope to be throwed out?" asked Chiffin. "I wouldn't trust that servant-friend of your's: it might be all a plant on her part."

"But you would trust me, Chiffin," said Elizabeth Paton, "if I were to get inside the house and fasten the rope for you to clamber up by?"

"To be sure! But why not, if you are once inside, creep down stairs and open one of the doors?"

"For the simple reason," replied Elizabeth, "that the Marquis takes very good care to have all the keys delivered into his hand every night before he goes to bed."

"Then how will you get in?" demanded the Cannibal.

"The woman-servant will let me up into her own chamber before the house is fastened for the night. In short, I should dress myself in humbler apparel—as I have done before—and go and visit her as a friend; so that it would not seem odd before the other servants for her to offer me part of her bed for the night. She of course must have a third share of whatever we get, as she will have to decamp directly the business is done."

"Ah! now I begin to see better into all your arrangements," said the Cannibal. "I suppose that you would creep down from the servant's chamber to that room looking on the portico, and get the rope in readiness? Well, so far so good: but what about dogs, or watchmen, or what not, on the premises at night?"

"Nothing of the sort to be apprehended," answered Elizabeth. "There are no watchmen—and the dogs are at the back of the building. You see that I have made the minutest inquiries; and the arrangements I am now proposing to you, are precisely those I intended to have had carried out, if those fellows that I spoke of had come to their appointment."

"And it's lucky they hav'n't," exclaimed Chiffin: "'cos why, the thing has now fell into my hands. Depend upon it we'll do the business as snug as possible. But why not one of them windows on the ground-floor?"

"Because," returned Elizabeth quickly, for she had a prompt answer to every objection that might be raised to her proposed scheme, "there is a porter who sleeps in a little room next to the entrance-hall; and he would be sure to hear the opening of the shutters of a ground-floor window."

"Then one of the windows at the back of the house?" suggested Chiffin.

"No—for have I not already told you that there are dogs in the rear of the premises? and though they are chained up, they would of course raise a disturbance. Depend upon it, I have well weighed every part of my plan—and I know it is the best. I have been two or three times already to the premises, and therefore know perfectly well that all I tell you is accurate."

"Then let it be as you say:"—and Chiffin confirmed his assent with a terrible oath.

"Precisely at midnight," said Elizabeth Paton, "I shall expect you."

"And I sha'n't fail," rejoined the Cannibal. "But you must get the rope and all them kind of things."

"Trust to me," answered Elizabeth. "And now good-bye till we meet again at midnight."

"Good-bye, Lady Bess: and I hope we shall have luck."

The Marquis of Eagledean's daughter then took her departure from the spot where she had thus remained conversing with the Cannibal for the best part of an hour; and as she disappeared from his view he said to himself, "Well, this is a lucky job! Who would have thought it? Instead of getting a beggarly five hundred pounds, as Lord Harold promised me, there's every chance of sacking some thousands. She said a mint of money. *That* must mean a jolly lot: but at all events, whatever I do get as my share, will be so much gained over and above Lord Harold's five hundred. I didn't tell her who my employer is: *that* wouldn't have done. I must keep it all to myself. And I sha'n't tell him either anything about my meeting with Lady Bess. He might refuse to have anything more to do in the business, if he learnt that I had let another into the job: he might even think better of it, and make his peace with his uncle by confessing the whole affair. Or he might raise objections, and say that it's *his* own money that I mean to help myself to in Eagledean's room. No—I will be mum upon the business. And now for another pipe."

The Cannibal continued to smoke for upwards of an hour after he had made these reflections; and at the expiration of that time Lord Harold joined him at the spot where he was awaited. But how changed was the young nobleman's appearance! He was dressed in threadbare garments, cut after a foreign fashion, and which he had purchased at an old-clothes shop in London. He had a great slouching hat which shaded his countenance—a red wig—and an immense beard fastened with gum to his chin. Indeed it ascended to the cheek-bones, thus concealing all the lower part of his face. He wore a moustache too—and had dyed his eyebrows with red ochre: so that altogether his own mother, were she alive, would not have recognised him. He had studied to

give himself the air of a distressed foreigner; and therein he had fully succeeded. It was in this guise that he had joined Chiffin at Tonbridge early in the morning of the day of which we are writing; and they had made an appointment to meet again at the spot where we now behold them.

"Well, my lord," said the Cannibal as Harold accosted him: "what news?"

"None," replied Staunton, in a tone of bitter vexation.

"None?" echoed Chiffin. "Then what have you been about?"

"I have been to the Park—or rather in the neighbourhood of it—and I watched for the appearance of one of the servants that I might get into discourse with him. But none fell in my way; and I was afraid of loitering about in the vicinity too long. I really do not know what is to be done. I see that this plan of mine will not do——"

"Well, I thought all along, my lord," observed Chiffin, "when you first told me of it this morning, that it was a queerish proceeding on your part—and a dangerous one too."

"How dangerous?" ejaculated Harold. "Why, you yourself did not know me on my appearing before you! How then could one of those domestics be likely to recognise me hereafter? But it is useless to discuss the matter. Some other means must be tried."

"If you will leave it to me, my lord," said the Cannibal, "I'll stake my existence that without any of these circumbendibus rigs, I'll go and find out in a few hours all that's necessary to know to enable me to do the business to-right."

"But how will you proceed?" demanded Lord Harold. "Observe! it is absolutely requisite to discover which is the bed-chamber of the Marquis."

"I know how requisite it is," rejoined the Cannibal: "but don't you bother yourself how I shall proceed. Perhaps I don't yet know that much myself. I shall trust to circumstances. But I say again, that if I don't find out all I want, I'll eat my own head."

"I am so fearful you will be recognised and apprehended," said Lord Harold. "From what you told me, my uncle knows you well——"

"But if I choose to run the risk as a stepping-stone towards getting my five hundred pounds," observed Chiffin, "what's the odds to you? If you had let *me* go about the work in the first instance, you wouldn't have had all this bungling."

"Perhaps not," said Lord Harold, reflecting profoundly. "Well," he exclaimed, after a long pause, "away with you! I see that I must trust it all in your hands."

"You can't do better, my lord. But where shall we meet again?"

"It is now one o'clock," said Harold, consulting his watch, which was however carefully concealed inside the pocket of his threadbare waistcoat. "It will take you a good hour to reach the neighbourhood of the Park: let us allow a couple of hours for your purpose—and another hour to return. I will remain here therefore till five o'clock: or at least I will not be far from the spot. If you do not come by five, I shall go and wait for you at that public-house where, as you told me, you slept last night."

"Well and good," answered the Cannibal: and he forthwith walked away at a good pace, as if fully in earnest to execute the commission which he had undertaken.

But, as the reader may well suppose, he did not find it necessary to proceed very far—being already in possession of all the information that was required—or at least thinking himself to be thus well informed. After walking about a mile across the fields, he stretched himself comfortably down under another hedge, and began smoking anew. Then he repaired to a lonely ale-house in a bye-lane, where he refreshed himself; and thus he managed to while away the time until the appointed hour for rejoining Lord Harold.

On returning to the spot where he had left the young nobleman, he found him anxiously awaiting his re-appearance; and throwing an expression of satisfaction into his countenance, he declared that he had obtained all the requisite information for the accomplishment of the murderous purpose that was entertained.

CHAPTER CXXIII.

ELIZABETH PATON'S CHAMBER.

On leaving Chiffin the Cannibal, Elizabeth Paton lost no time in repairing to the hotel at which she had left the carriage; and it being soon got in readiness, she returned to Edenbridge Park. On alighting at the mansion, she learnt from the hall-porter that Mr. Hawkshaw had arrived, and that he had gone out in company with Frank and Adolphus to view the grounds. Elizabeth hastily ascended to her own chamber—put off her bonnet and shawl—and then descended to seek her father. Ascertaining that he was in the library, she proceeded thither; and found him pacing slowly to and fro in a thoughtful mood. On his side he at once saw by his daughter's countenance that she had something important to speak of; and she at once gave him to understand that such was the case.

She began to explain to him everything that had occurred between herself and Chiffin—all she had succeeded in gleaning from his lips—and how she had devised a scheme for inveigling him into the mansion. The reader will observe that she was unacquainted with the name of the person who had sought Chiffin out in his concealment at Saxondale Castle, and who was employing him to do the foul deed of murder of which he had spoken.

"Now, my dear Elizabeth," said the Marquis, who had listened with deep attention, but likewise with the most painful feelings, "you have thrown a complete light upon a subject which was perplexing me at the instant you entered. Yes—there can be no doubt of it!—the villanous employer of this dreadful man is no other than my own nephew Harold Staunton!"

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Elizabeth, with horror depicted in her countenance. "But how know you this, dear father?"

The Marquis proceeded to give explanations in his turn,—reciting all that Mr. Hawkshaw had told him relative to the mysterious visit of Lord Harold, in company with some ruffian, to Saxondale Castle. That this ruffian was none other than Chiffin, was now evident from what he himself had told Eliza-

beth: and equally clear was it that Lord Harold must be the Cannibal's employer in the murderous design against the Marquis. But then arose the questions — wherefore Lord Harold and Chiffin should have made that burglarious incursion into Lady Saxondale's bed-chamber at the Castle? and what it was the young nobleman had so diligently sought for in the cupboard? As a matter of course these were mysteries that defied all conjecture on the part of Lord Eagledean and his daughter Elizabeth: nor did that burglarious inroad appear to connect itself with the present scheme which by such a strange combination of circumstances had come to their knowledge.

"You know, my dear Elizabeth," said the Marquis, "that after my excursion into Lincolnshire to rescue Harold from the power of Lady Saxondale, I at once sent him abroad, without permitting him to remain an unnecessary hour in England, and without inviting him to Stamford Manor. That he did go abroad, I am well assured, inasmuch as I heard of him through a friend at Bruges—and subsequently I received a letter from the young man himself, written at Boulogne. I knew not *then* that Lady Saxondale was on the Continent: this fact I only learnt to-day from Mr. Hawkshaw. That she and Harold have met, I feel convinced. I can read it all! That fiend of a woman has inspired him with the heinous idea of taking my life, so that he may at once succeed to my title and estates. Hence his stealthy return to England—hence his seeking out the villain Chiffin, with whom I have the best possible reason for knowing that Lady Saxondale was at one time in correspondence. However, Providence has interposed in my behalf; and through this fortuitous meeting of yourself and Chiffin, my vile nephew's design is made known to us."

"Heaven be thanked," said Elizabeth fervently, "that we shall thus be enabled to frustrate it!"

"But I do not altogether understand, my dear Elizabeth," observed the Marquis, "the project that you have in view."

"Let me explain it fully, my dear father," returned his daughter; "and you can then inform me whether you approve of it. In dealing with Chiffin, I felt that I had two distinct objects to gain—two distinct ends to keep in view. The first and paramount object was not merely to baffle his design against yourself, but also to extort from him the fullest confession in respect to his employer: for I felt that it would not be merely sufficient to save your valuable life from the present diabolical design, but also to obtain a complete insight into the details of the foul conspiracy—so that by learning who the prime mover is, you might be fully on your guard for the future. This was one object. But observe!—I felt at once that the utmost prudence, blended with no small degree of cunning, was requisite to accomplish these aims. Suppose that instead of devising a scheme for entrapping Chiffin into a snare, I had merely given you such information as would enable you to frustrate his nefarious project:—in that case, even though he were handed over to justice, he might have retained secret until the last the name of his employer."

"I understand you, my dear Elizabeth: you have explained one of the two objects you had in view. I think, my dear girl, tha. I can fathom the other—but proceed to develop it in your own words."

"Father," resumed the lady, in a mournful voice, "it is a painful topic——very painful: but nevertheless it must be touched upon. You cannot have forgotten that when I narrated to you the history of my past career, it transpired to your knowledge that Chiffin and I were no strangers to each other. In short, he is acquainted with much of that dread portion of my history on which I can only retrospect with the profoundest sorrow. Being thus acquainted with my antecedents, it needs but a single word from his lips to proclaim to the world what your daughter has been. I should be covered with ignominy and disgrace: nay, more—my personal safety would be endangered; for in the special case of that adventure with Marlow and Malton, the identity which could not be established at Dover, might be indubitably fixed by a revelation or confession from the lips of Chiffin. Therefore it occurred to me in a moment, that as I dared not make an enemy of that man unless I got him completely into my own power, it was absolutely necessary to ensnare him in some trap craftily devised to catch him—and then dictate terms to which he would be but too glad to listen. By such a proceeding I foresaw that all my objects would be gained: the plot against your valuable life would be frustrated—the name of his employer would be elicited—and measures might be taken to induce him to leave the country on terms that would likewise seal his lips in respect to his knowledge of my antecedents. Rest assured, dear father, that as all these calculations swept through my mind, I experienced a terrible repugnance at being compelled to make terms with a ruthless assassin, instead of suffering him to be handed over to justice. But I thought that if my own reputation could be saved, while at the same time *he* should be disarmed of any power of injuring you for the future,—you would prefer the adoption of such a course."

"Can I hesitate for a moment, my dear child, to approve of your proceedings?" exclaimed the Marquis. "Yes — most assuredly I do approve of them!"

"And I thought," continued Elizabeth, "that by the scheme I had devised, Chiffin might be brought face to face with you and me alone—that his entry being effected without the slightest chance of alarming any of the household, the transaction which is to mark the coming night would rest between us three—and that not another inmate of the mansion need be one whit the wiser."

"With this view your plans have been admirably taken," said the Marquis; "and you have displayed an extraordinary degree of self-possession and forethought in dealing with that villain. Yes, Elizabeth —the whole affair shall be kept a profound secret. I had already told Hawkshaw not to mention to any one that he had brought me evil intelligence concerning my nephew. More than he already knows, he need not be made acquainted with: it is not necessary for him to be informed of the additional clue that has been obtained to the unravelment of Harold's execrable intentions. As for your mother, Adolphus, or Frank,—they need know nothing at all in respect to these proceedings: it would be worse than useless to distress their minds. And now, Elizabeth, let us arrange all the details for the efficient carrying-out of the scheme which you

yourself have initiated to disarm this dreadful man for the future, and rid the country of his presence."

The father and daughter accordingly deliberated for some little time longer: but it is not here necessary to record any more of their conversation. Suffice it to observe that for the remainder of the day they maintained an outward air of composure,—so that the Marchioness of Eagledean, Adolphus, Frank, and the Squire, were very far from suspecting that for the coming night they had such important proceedings in view.

It was the custom of the Marquis of Eagledean, his family, and his household, to keep good hours: but on the present occasion, having Mr. Hawkshaw as their guest, they could not retire quite so early as was their wont. But soon after eleven o'clock the inmates of Edenbridge Park had sought their respective chambers: and an observer from the outside, might have seen the various lights extinguishing one by one. Such an observer there was: namely, Chiffin the Cannibal—who a little before midnight reached the vicinage of the place; and scaling the fence which encompassed the grounds in the midst of which the mansion stood, he traversed the park, bending his steps towards the entrance-portico.

We must now explain that the particular window which Elizabeth had described to the Cannibal, belonged to her own dressing-room, whence a side-door communicated with her sleeping chamber. Immediately on retiring thither, at about half-past eleven, she suffered her maid to assist in disapparelling her of the rich and elegant raiment which had constituted her evening toilet—and likewise to loosen the masses of her raven hair, which now floated in dark luxuriance over her shoulders. She thus accepted as usual the services of the abigail, inasmuch as it would have seemed strange to dispense with attentions that were invariably rendered: but Elizabeth hastened to dismiss the maid as soon as possible; and the moment she was alone she extinguished the tapers, so that Chiffin from the outside might not behold lights burning in the windows contiguous to that whereby his entry was to be effected. But it was a beautiful moonlit night; and the argentine lustre, pouring into Miss Paton's chamber, served to guide her in whatsoever more she had to do.

She put on a morning wrapper; and then taking from a chest of drawers a pair of pistols which her father had lent her, she placed them conveniently at the foot of her bed, within the shade of the curtain. From the same drawers she drew forth a large coil of stout cord; and then passing into the dressing-room, she attached one end to a massive piece of furniture which was there, and which being against the wall near the window, would prove a sufficient resistance against any weight that the rope might have to sustain. Scarcely was this arrangement accomplished, when a gentle tap at the bed-room door met her ears; and she hastened to open it. It was her father, the Marquis of Eagledean, who entered. A few rapidly whispered words were exchanged between them; and he proceeded to conceal himself in the deep shade of the curtains at the head of the bed.

Elizabeth re-locked the chamber door, and passed again into the dressing-room. There she gently and noiselessly opened the window; and just at that moment she beheld the form of the Cannibal crossing the gravel-road forming the carriage-drive that led up to the front of the portico. She threw out the rope, so that it hung over the edge of the low parapet surrounding the top of that portico. She felt the cord tighten in the grasp of the Cannibal: he clambered up with considerable dexterity; and his grim ferocious countenance soon appeared above the level of the parapet. The moonlight streamed fully upon his features; and without saying a word, he bestowed upon Elizabeth Paton a significant look of satisfaction at the manner in which she had thus far carried out her arrangements with him. He stood upon the summit of the portico: she beckoned him to enter—and he introduced himself through the window into the dressing-room.

"We will draw up the rope," she said in a low whisper, "in case any one should happen to pass that way while you are engaged inside:"—and having done so, she likewise closed the window as noiselessly and carefully as she had opened it.

Chiffin had his club in his hand; and Elizabeth Paton knew that she must be full well upon her guard against any sudden blow which in his rage he might deal her at the first instant of finding himself caught in a trap. But her courage did not fail her: on the contrary, it acquired additional force in proportion to the growing emergency of circumstances.

"Tread gently," she said, in a low whisper so as to keep up appearances to the very last moment: "and follow me."

Thus speaking, she led the way into the bed-chamber,—the Cannibal walking as cautiously as if he were treading upon eggs. Elizabeth Paton glided on a few feet in front of him:—from the foot of the bed she snatched up one of the pistols she had deposited there; and her left arm she kept in readiness to ward off a blow from the ruffian's cudgel, or else clutch it with her hand, as circumstances might direct.

All in an instant she turned round upon him. In the brilliant moonlight did the pistol gleam before his eyes; and as she boldly grasped his club, she said, "Not a word—not a movement—or you are a dead man!"

The villain was astounded: he was literally transfixed with an astonishment so absorbing that it left not even scope for an ebullition of rage. At the same instant the Marquis of Eagledean stepped from behind the curtains; and in a low but hasty voice, he said, "You are in our power! If you raise an alarm, you are lost!"

Chiffin's discomfiture was complete. Elizabeth Paton held one pistol within a foot of his forehead: the Marquis had presented another as he spoke. His hang-dog countenance grew pale as death: horrible ideas swept like a whirlwind through his brain: the gibbet's noose seemed to be tightening round his neck: the floor felt like a drop about to give way underneath his feet.

"Yes—you are in our power," said the Marquis, hurriedly though firmly: "but I tell you at once that what may be your fate depends entirely upon yourself."

"But what does it all mean?" asked Chiffin, whose brain was in a complete whirl; and yet he moved not a single inch: he was excited in one sense with horrible apprehensions—and appalled as well as astounded in another.

"It means that you may purchase life and freedom," responded Lord Eagledean, "if you do our bidding."

"Well then, what is it?" demanded the ruffian, beginning to breathe more freely: for it naturally struck him that if he were really to be handed over to the grasp of justice, the officers thereof would likewise have been in ambush.

"It cannot be all explained in a moment," said the Marquis. "You must suffer me to take from about your person whatever means you may have of doing mischief. But I warn you not to attempt the slightest resistance: or one of these pistols will level you on the floor."

"And you don't mean me any harm," growled the Cannibal, "if I do as you wish?"

"Our present proceedings speak for themselves," replied Lord Eagledean. "If we had wished to hand you over to the vengeance of the law, we should not have been alone here to encounter you: and if it were your life I wanted, what is to prevent me from at once sending a bullet through the head of a man who thus burglariously enters my house?"

"Well then, I will trust you, my lord," said the Cannibal: but he could not prevent his reptile-eyes from glaring with diabolic malignity upon Elizabeth Paton, whose demeanour was however resolute and decided.

The ruffian surrendered up his club to the Marquis, who then proceeded to search his pockets,—Elizabeth standing by with the pistol pointed towards his head. A knife and a phial—the latter carefully enveloped in a piece of brown paper so as to prevent it from breaking—were the two principal articles thus discovered about the person of the ensnared Cannibal.

"Now," said Lord Eagledean, "sit down in that chair—and listen to what I have to say,—truthfully answering me likewise such questions as I may have to put."

The Cannibal obeyed; and as he placed himself in a large arm-chair which the Marquis had indicated, the pistol that Elizabeth Paton held in her hand, still pointed towards his head. He thus saw that although life and liberty were promised him on some conditions yet to be explained, those who had him in their power were nevertheless resolved to enforce their purposes and dictate their terms with unflinching resolution. If for an instant the idea of a sudden assault upon them both and a desperate attempt at escape, entered the ruffian's brain, it was immediately discarded: so utterly at their mercy did he find himself—and so impossible was it to render his condition worse by hearing what they had to say.

"I have already promised," said the Marquis, "that you shall be treated with consideration if you do as we desire: and I will not fly from my word. You have to choose between two alternatives; and I will at once present them to your view. One is, that upon pulling this bell,"—and the Marquis, as he spoke, caught hold of a silken cord hanging against the wall,—"the whole household will rush hither to seize upon the man for whom Newgate yawns: and I need not remind you of the fate upon which you would thus rush. The other alternative is, that if you will confess everything that I desire to know, and give me proof that what you say is correct, I will allow you to go hence—I will furnish you with a sum of money to take yourself out of England—I will make such arrangements that on your arrival in the United States you shall receive the sum of one thousand guineas. Now, which alternative do you select?"

"As if there was a question!" exclaimed Chiffin eagerly: then as a sudden gloom settled again upon his diabolical countenance, he said, "But how do I know that all this is to turn out as you say—and that when you have got out of me what you want to know, you won't give me up to justice all the same?"

"For this reason," answered the Marquis,—"that my own nephew has instigated you to a fiendish deed; and that I would fain spare that miserable young man from the damning ignominy of exposure, which must inevitably take place if you are surrendered up to justice."

"Well, my lord," observed Chiffin, evidently satisfied with this response, "it does look as if you was in earnest, and as it's all the same to me who I serve, as long as I get paid for my pains, I may just as well turn round on that precious nephew of your's as not. So now go on, my lord—and I'll be bound to say I'll convince you that the answers I give to your questions are the true ones."

"Respond briefly therefore, and in a straightforward manner," said the Marquis; "so that the present scene may be brought all the more speedily to an end. In the first place, how came Lord Harold to know you were secreted in Saxondale Castle?"

"'Cos why, my lord, Lady Saxondale told him as how I was the properest feller to do the little business he had in hand."

"And for what purpose did you and he pay that visit to Lady Saxondale's chamber, when you alarmed the servant-girl who was sleeping there?"

"By jingo!" exclaimed Chiffin, in astonishment, "your lordship knows everything! Why, you see, I myself wasn't aware till this morning what it was Lord Harold searched for in the cupboard, of which he had the key in his possession. But to-day he let me into that secret. The little bottle, my lord, which you just now took out of my pocket, is what your nephew wanted in that there cupboard at Saxondale Castle."

"And what does it contain?" inquired the Marquis, though he more than half suspected.

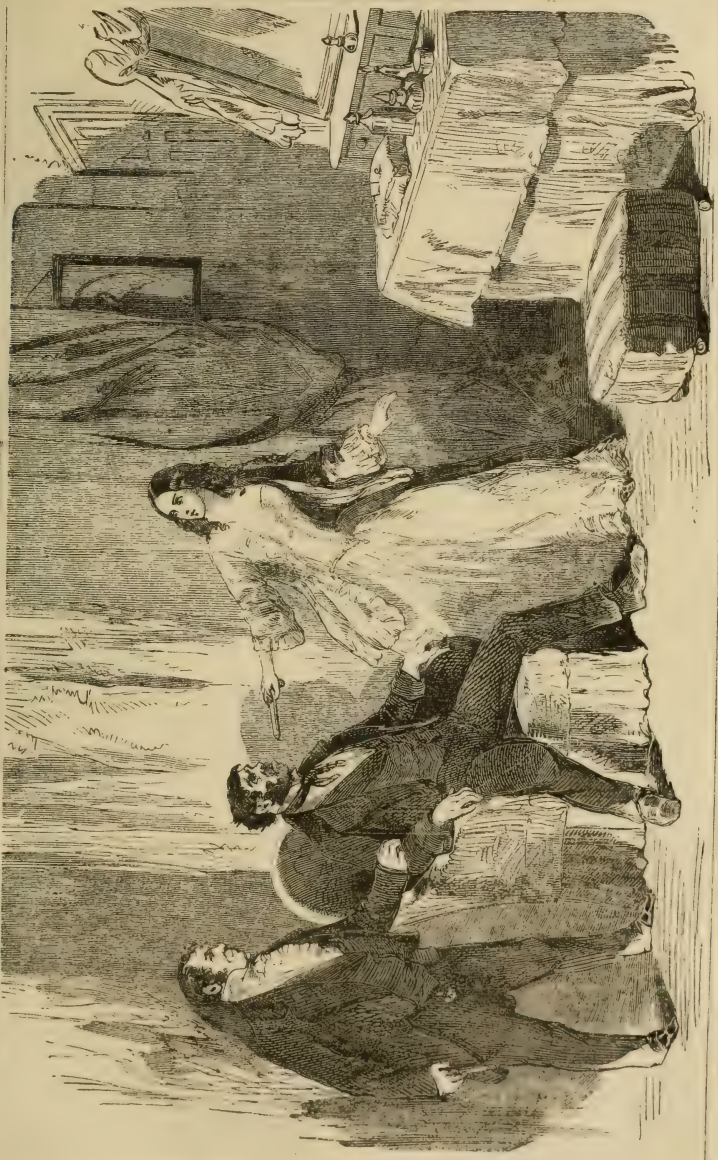
"A pison, my lord, one drop of which would kill a helephant, and therefore quite enough to give a man his gruel."

In the clear moonlight which flooded the chamber, the Marquis of Eagledean and Elizabeth Paton exchanged looks of unutterable horror at this dreadful announcement.

"And I suppose, then," continued the Marquis, "that you were to use this deadly venom against me——Harold's own uncle!" he added, in a voice that suddenly sank with the force of the emotions agitating in his breast.

"Well, my lord, that's about the rights of it," answered Chiffin: "and so I think that if you put two and two together, you'll see how nice all the circumstances fit into their proper places, and that I therefore am speaking the truth."

"Would to heaven that there were room for doubting you!" ejaculated Lord Eagledean: "but there is not:"—then subduing his emotions, and



No. 77.—THIEVERIES.

speaking with renewed calmness, he said, "Where is Lord Harold now?"

"At Tonbridge, my lord:"—and Chiffin proceeded to explain the exact spot where he had appointed to meet Lord Harold Staunton at four o'clock in the morning, by which time it was supposed that everything in respect to the contemplated tragedy would be accomplished, and that he (Chiffin) would have had ample leisure to reach that trysting-place.

"But you would not have me believe," said the Marquis of Eagledean, "that my nephew has ventured undisguised into the neighbourhood of this domain?"

"Undisguised?" ejaculated Chiffin. "I'd be bound that if your lordship met him face to face in the open street and in the broad daylight, you wouldn't know him:"—and he then proceeded to describe the exact appearance which Lord Harold Staunton now wore in the disguise he had assumed.

"That you have answered truthfully to all my questions, I am certain," said the Marquis: "for I was informed by one of the labourers on my estate, that such an individual as you have described was seen lurking about in the vicinage this morning. I presume that you have nothing more to tell me? Indeed I have heard enough——far, far too much! I will now keep my word. But yet I have two things more to say. In the first place, what guarantee have I that when you go hence you will not at once proceed to the appointed spot and warn Lord Harold that all is discovered?"

"Why should I?" demanded the Cannibal. "Do you think, my lord, I care one single farthing for your nephew? Not a bit on't! Besides, even if I did, I know from what you have said that you only mean to give him a blowing-up; and then I dare say it will be all over. No—I sha'n't trouble myself any more about him."

"Listen!" ejaculated the Marquis, as a thought struck him. "The amount of money which you will find in the United States will depend on the fidelity with which you keep this promise not to go and warn my nephew of the failure and discovery of his detestable plot. But now to the other subject on which I had to say a few words. You will get out of England as quick as ever you can. It suits my views—no matter for what reason—that everything you know relative to this person,"—and he glanced towards his daughter, whom for obvious reasons he did not choose to proclaim as such in the Cannibal's presence,—"should be buried in oblivion. Were you out of malice or spite to mention to any one the incidents of her past life, it could not fail to reach her ears, and would in due course be conveyed to mine. I have promised that you shall find a thousand guineas at a bank in New York; and that promise I will faithfully keep. But if I find that you, with equal fidelity, adhere to the several injunctions I have given you, in three months' time I will remit you a farther sum of five hundred guineas. These remittances will be made through the American house of Godson, Gooding, and Company at New York: you cannot fail to remember the names. And now I will give you one hundred guineas, that you may see your way clear to escape out of the country. I was about to add, for my own sake, that it pains me much, and mortifies me more than I can express, to have thus to deal with such a one as you: but on my nephew's account I am disposed to show you all this mercy, as well as to adopt the means of removing you from a country whose laws you have outraged in the most criminal manner. On this subject, however, I will say no more—unless it be to express a hope that in another clime you may enter upon another career, and that you may do your best to make atonement for the hideous crimes you have perpetrated in your native land."

"It's very pretty spoken, my lord," answered the Cannibal; "and I think, what with the little bit of advice, together with the blunt, I shall manage to get on uncommon well amongst the Yankees."

The Marquis of Eagledean drew forth a packet containing a hundred guineas in gold; with which he had purposely provided himself ere seeking his daughter's chamber; and this amount he handed to Chiffin.

"Now," he said, "depart by the same way that you entered—so that there may be no possibility of alarming any of the inmates of the house."

For the first time throughout this scene, which had lasted about half-an-hour, the pistol was withdrawn from the close vicinage of the Cannibal's head; and securing the money about his person, he passed into the dressing-room, followed by Lord Eagledean,—Elizabeth Paton remaining behind in the bed-chamber. The window was opened—the rope was thrown out—and Chiffin slid down, reaching the ground in safety. The Marquis drew up the cord—closed the window—and returned to his daughter. They congratulated each other upon the success with which the project had been attended; but it was with renewed feelings of horror that they contemplated the detestable conduct of Lord Harold Staunton and the fiendish instigation of Lady Saxondale.

The Marquis bade Elizabeth "good night;" and taking the phial of poison away with him, hastened to secure it in some safe place:—then, having visited the chamber which he and the Marchioness occupied, to give some excuse for having sat up so late and likewise for the necessity of going stealthily forth from the mansion at such an hour, he armed himself with a pair of pistols—descended the staircase cautiously—and issued into the open air.

CHAPTER CXXIV.

THE CROSS-ROADS.

In a lonely spot within about a mile of Tonbridge, where two cross-roads met, Lord Harold Staunton was pacing to and fro with agitated steps. He wore that same deep disguise which we have already described, and beneath which he had hoped to conceal his identity from the knowledge of every one save his accomplice in meditated crime.

It was now verging towards four o'clock in the morning: he had not been in bed all night; and though there was a piercing chill in the air, yet was he hot with the feverish state of his blood. The beautiful moonlight had disappeared; and dark clouds had gathered over the face of heaven. A low wind moaned through those trees which had become completely denuded of their verdure, and rustled amidst the boughs to which a few dried and crisping leaves still clung. Although the appoint-

ment with Chiffin was for four o'clock at this place, yet Harold had been there since a little after two: for he thought that if his agent's work were done with more promptitude than was anticipated, he would lose no time in joining him at that spot.

It was, as already said, a lonely place; and all circumstances combined to render it gloomy enough. The darkness which prevailed—the moaning of the low wind—the rustling of the dead leaves on the withering boughs, produced impressions which, mingling with the dread thoughts and fearful apprehensions of Lord Harold Staunton, rendered him so nervous and restless, so uneasy and excited, that there were moments when he felt as if to tarry longer were impossible, and that he must fly precipitately from that spot. But still it was absolutely necessary to await the return of Chiffin—if he should ever come at all. But why did the young nobleman doubt his re-appearance? Did he suspect him of any treachery in respect to the compact which existed between them? No: but he feared lest Chiffin should fail in the enterprise which he had undertaken—lest he should be captured or killed in the prosecution thereof. And if so, then farewell to all the hopes which Harold had entertained! But even worse than mere disappointment might ensue. For if taken alive, Chiffin might be induced to confess everything: and who could tell to what an extent an outraged uncle might in that case go with the view of punishing a nephew who had sought his life.

Such were the wild fears which kept sweeping through the mind of that guilty young nobleman. They recurred again and again: he could not banish them. So far from that, they seemed to come back each time with renewed force: he felt that his brain was being worked up into the frenzy of a horrible suspense—and every now and then he said to himself in a sort of desperation, "No, Chiffin could not fail: he was so certain of success! Doubtless it is all over now—and I am Marquis of Eagledean!"

But then the moaning of the wind seemed to take the accents of human tones; and the word "*Murderer*" swept past his ears. And those rustling leaves too—they seemed to be the voices of the dead, echoing that same dreadful sound, "*Murderer!*" As he gazed upward, the very clouds appeared to assume hideous shapes—colossal and fantastic, though fearfully appalling: and thus on the face of the heavens themselves did it seem as if the stupendous tragedy which he supposed by this time to have been performed at Edenbridge Park, was being enacted all over again by those gigantic forms agitating on the theatre of the air. And then too he would recoil with a cold feeling of indescribable horror, as the fancy suddenly struck him that he beheld a pale and ghastly countenance looking at him over one of the withering hedges which skirted the roads; and though he knew it was but the imagination, yet the idea increased the terror of his thoughts and added to the sombre gloom of the scene.

We have said that it was a spot where two cross-roads met. At one of the angles formed by two of the diverging routes, there stood a portion of a thick upright piece of wood, which seemed to be the remnant of a finger-post that once was there to indicate to wayfarers the names of the different places to which the paths led. Lord Harold every now and then stood for five minutes together at this post, so as to command with his view the road up which he thought it most likely Chiffin would come. That is to say, he penetrated with his straining eyes, as well as he was able, through the depth of gloom, in the hope of discerning a human form approaching. But all was unbroken darkness there: time was wearing on—four o'clock was now approaching—and as yet Chiffin came not.

"But he is sure to come," said Harold to himself, as for the twentieth time he turned away from that post and resumed his agitated walk. "Yes he will come: he is certain to have succeeded—and he will bring me the intelligence that I am Marquis of Eagledean! He will not deceive me, because I told him that his reward was not to be paid until rumour should confirm the assurance of my uncle's death. He thinks that we shall go to London together—or at least that we shall meet there in the course of the next night, by which time I shall have ascertained that his tale is true. This is what he thinks; and therefore he will not deceive me. But such is *not* my plan. When he comes—and I am sure that he *will* come—his reward shall be at once paid him; and we shall separate—I hope never to meet again. Then away to France—and there will I affect to be travelling quietly and unostentatiously as the other day I was, until messengers overtake me to report that my uncle is dead, and that I am Marquis of Eagledean. And then what horror shall I pretend! what distress shall I assume!—— Hah! what was that?"

And in the midst of his dreadful musings, the young nobleman stopped short and listened. It seemed like a human voice that met his ears. But no: he felt assured it was naught save the wind—that same wind which had already terrified and startled him more than once since he had sought this gloomy spot.

Retracing his way in the direction of the post, he was again filled with a sudden trepidation; and a glacial feeling of intense horror swept over him, as a human voice once more appeared to reach his ears. He listened, while the cold perspiration stood out in large drops upon his forehead, and all the blood appeared to have stagnated in his veins. Yes—assuredly it was a human voice: but it was a sort of low chaunt or crooning which he heard. And now too he beheld some shape moving about near the post. Gathering his courage, he advanced; and when almost close up to the spot where the post stood, he discerned through the obscurity a wretched-looking old mendicant female tramping about,—half-muttering, half-chaunting some song the sense of which Harold could not catch.

"Ah! who are you?" she demanded, turning abruptly round upon him as the sounds of his footsteps on the hard frosty ground met her ears.

He now perceived that she really was, as he had fancied, a wretched ragged mendicant. She was very short in stature, with bowed form, and a countenance the most hideous and horrible he had ever in all his life beheld. It was shrivelled into a mass of wrinkles: the mouth went in at a sharp angle through the total loss of the teeth; while the thin, prominent, pointed nose gave a still sharper and more angular shape to the profile. She was in sooth a revolting object—a shocking caricature of "the human form divine,"—one of those hideous hags in

whose presence it is impossible to feel otherwise than a sensation of mingled disgust, aversion, and fear. Her eyes seemed to shine with a reptile-light: there was something of horrible sardonism blended with maniac wildness in the expression of her features; —and her voice was shrill in some of its accents and guttural in others.

"Ah! who are you?" she had demanded, gazing up from her own stunted form at the tall stature of the disguised young nobleman. "A wanderer like myself—but not quite a beggar like me, though:" —and then she laughed horribly.

"What are you doing here?" inquired Lord Harold, who could not help thinking that there was some meaning in her presence and a certain significancy in her look.

"What am I doing here?" she repeated. "Nightly do my wandering steps bring me to this accursed spot."

"Accursed spot?" echoed Harold, as if the term had something which struck deep into his own conscience. "What mean you?"

"I mean," responded the hag, "that over where you are now standing, three human forms have swung in chains: on the very ground where your feet rest, was their victim's blood poured out;— and underneath your feet, were the rotting and blackened remains of the three murderers buried, when the gibbet broke and they fell rattling in their chains to the ground."

Harold literally groaned as he heard this hideous tale; and all in a moment it seemed as if the gibbet sprang up anew before him—the broken post shot up into a gallows, with its triple arms and its horrible burden of *three*, swayed by the wind, and with the clank of chains above his head. He was appalled: and again did the perspiration break out cold and clammy all over him. Then, the next moment, as his gaze settled upon the repulsive countenance of the hag, it seemed as if her eyes were shining, or rather burning like red-hot coals as they glared out at him from their sockets. That they were unnaturally bright—especially for so old a creature—there could be no doubt: but that his own fevered fancy, worked up to the highest pitch of horror, augmented every circumstance which was thus combining to fill him with dismay, was equally certain.

"Yes—this post," she continued, laying her hand —and a long shrivelled one it was—upon the top of the fragment of wood, which only projected about three feet out of the ground,—"is the remnant of the gibbet which once stood here. Ah! it was a fine finger-post, was it not?"—and again she laughed horribly, with half-cackling half-guttural sounds, to hear which made the very flesh creep upon the bones.

"And what had you to do with the murderers or their victims?" demanded Lord Harold, again recovering somewhat of his fortitude.

"The three murderers were my own three sons," responded the woman: and then her looks became so wildly fierce that it seemed as if she were about to turn into some horrible monster to spring at Lord Harold, to tear or bite him.

"Your sons?" he said, recoiling two or three paces, and again with a sensation of the flesh creeping upon the bones.

"Yes—my three sons," she answered. "Forty years have passed since they were strung up here. I don't mourn for them now: it's too long back— and the feelings that once were in me have turned into the savage hate of a tiger-cat. But I tell you again that always between sunset and sunrise do I come here to croon their dirge. I don't know why I do it: the people in the neighbourhood say I am mad—and perhaps I am. I never come when the moon and the stars are out—but when all is darkness; and sometimes I stay here for hours and hours together, when the gloom rests upon the earth in the long, long nights of winter."

Lord Harold felt a sort of relief on hearing the woman thus half-proclaim herself to be mad: for it seemed to account for that strange and partially significant expression of countenance which it at first struck him she wore. Indeed, now that he had learnt the horrible legend connected with this spot, —and of which he was utterly ignorant when he had appointed it as a *rendezvous* for Chiffin the Cannibal,—he felt a certain comfort even in the companionship of this vile repulsive hag: for he could not have endured to tarry any longer alone in a place whose associations, when united with his own dark troubled thoughts, would have proved absolutely overwhelming.

"And where do you live, my good woman?" asked Harold, for the purpose of keeping her in conversation.

"Live?" she echoed, with biting scorn in her laugh: "did I not tell you I was a wanderer and a beggar? But yet I do live somewhere," she immediately added, as if in obedience to a second thought or a more lucid effort of memory. "Yes— there is a shed hard by, where I stretch my limbs and eat my sorry meal. Ah! it was a smiling cottage once: that was many, many long years ago! And it was my cottage too; and I lived there with my three sons. Three fine tall young men were they, as ever you could wish to see—as tall as you are, and as handsome too: for I can see that *you* are handsome, for all that mass of hair which you have stuck upon your face."

"What do you mean?" demanded Harold, a sudden terror seizing upon him: for the woman's observation appeared to imply that she knew he wore a disguise and that she had not failed to see through it.

"I mean exactly what I say," she answered, with another chuckling, cackling, guttural kind of laugh, which once more turned the blood to ice in his veins and made the flesh creep. "But no matter: I was telling you about myself. Well, I had that smiling cottage once, and those three fine boys. Boys!—they were young men: but in my fondness I called them boys even until the very last. They did that terrible deed—an unfortunate traveller was their victim. The law took them—the law was merciless to them, as they were to that victim: it raised a gibbet—and it strung them up to it. Then I was left all alone. Nobody offered to turn me out of the cottage, even when I could pay no rent: for nobody wanted to live in it. It was too near to the scene of blood: it was the house where the murderers had dwelt. So, gradually it fell into ruin. Window after window tumbled out —the rain and the snow came in—the little bits of furniture rotted away; and at last it was a mere shed with nothing in it. That is my home, if a

same you choose to call it;" and again she laughed, but now with biting mockery once more.

"But what did you mean," asked Harold, who still wondered why Chiffin came not, and kept throwing uneasy looks in the direction of the road whence he expected to see him emerge; "what did you mean by your remark just now?"

"Oh! of the hair plastered on your face?" exclaimed the hag; and her reptile eyes glared maliciously. "Don't you think I can see well enough that you wear a disguise? To be sure! Mad as I may be, you can't deceive me—not you indeed!"

"This is ridiculous," said Harold, though in reality he was seriously alarmed: and again he fancied—his evil conscience made him think it—that there was some meaning in her presence there, as well as something significant and deeply mysterious in her words.

"Ah! you think it ridiculous?" she said: "or you pretend to do so—but you don't in your heart. How like you this spot? Is it not a pleasant one to wait about at?—is not this ground which covers the remains of murderers and of the murdered, an agreeable one to tread upon? Ah! if you remained here long, and visited it often and at all seasons, you would picture to yourself the different things that my fancy sometimes suggests. At such a time as this, for instance—when all is blackness around, and the very earth itself seems black—you would think that this spot opened yawningly, and that its darkness sent up four *dark* shapes one after the other—the murdered and his three murderers! Or at another time, when the snow lay thick and deep upon the ground, you would fancy that it became agitated—that it moved—that it grew up into four *white* shapes; and these the shapes of four spectres from the other world—the murdered and his three murderers!"

"Hold!" exclaimed Staunton, seized with unspeakable horror. "Continue not thus! It is frightful to hear you talk in such a manner!"

"Frightful?" echoed the woman: "then does your conscience cause you to be terrified so? Ah! you have not yet told me why you are here. Did you knowingly and spontaneously choose this accursed spot for some dark purpose of your own? did you choose it because in its own terrible associations there is something congenial to what is passing in your mind, or what you are causing to be done? Say—wherefore this disguise?"

Then, as the hag uttered these words, she with her long, bony, withered fingers, clutched the hair of the false beard fastened on with gum to the lower part of the young nobleman's countenance; and with a single wrench she tore it off. The pain it inflicted excited to fury the rage which he felt at this sudden and most unexpected assault: a cry like that of a hyena burst from his lips—his arm was raised in a moment to strike the hag to the ground—but with an extraordinary cat-like nimbleness, she darted aside; and as her horrible cackling, chuckling laugh quivered from out her toothless mouth, she tossed the false beard over the hedge into the adjacent field.

Harold stopped short, transfixed with horror and dismay. A thousand wild and terrific ideas swept through his mind. Who was this hag that seemed to have detected him, or had penetrated his disguise? was she a being of this world? or was she some evil spectre bearing a substantial form? were there such things as witches? in short, what did it all signify? what meant this assemblage of mysteries and horrors through which for the last quarter of an hour he had been hurried, since the first moment he encountered that wretch?

"No, no," she said, "you dare not strike me! If you did, the earth would open at your feet, and my three sons would spring up to immolate you with the chains in which they were hung, and in which too their rotting corpses were buried."

"But I must and will know who you are!" exclaimed Lord Harold, well nigh goaded to madness. "Tell me—for mercy's sake tell me!" he cried, instantaneously adopting a tone of passionate entreaty.

"Shall I tell you who *you* are?" asked the hag, now fearlessly accosting him again: and as she clutched his arm with her shrivelled but lanky fingers, she looked up into his face with a hideous expression of malignity,—saying, "After all, you must confess that this is an appropriate spot for your appointment, Lord Harold Staunton!"

The young nobleman recoiled with increased dismay: he staggered back as if stricken by the sudden blow of a hammer. The terror of his situation was at its height—the horror of his feelings was consummated. His countenance was pale as death—aye, and ghastly as that of the ghastliest corpse. and he gazed upon the hag with feelings that can be better imagined than described.

Suddenly her laugh rang forth again, like the bitter mockery of fiends: and then she said, "Can't you understand that it is your friend Chiffin the Cannibal who has sent me to join you here?"

Lord Harold Staunton naturally clutched with avidity at this interpretation of the hag's presence there, and of the mystery of her knowledge of who he was: but while a feeling of unspeakable relief thus took possession of his mind, he inwardly cursed the folly of Chiffin in sending such a mad woman as his messenger. And then, too, that feeling of relief was almost instantaneously succeeded by one of terrific apprehension: for it now occurred to him that the plot must have failed—that Chiffin must be in some danger—and hence his fear of joining Lord Harold at the place of appointment.

"Where is Chiffin?" he asked hurriedly: "and why did you play me such a malicious trick? why too have you been delaying me here so long with your different tales?——But fool that I am," he muttered to himself, "thus to question a mad woman, and thus to prolong the very delay which has so angered me!"

"Chiffin is in my shed," replied the hag, who seemed to enjoy Lord Harold's vexation and wrath; and her wrinkled countenance was still more shrivelled up into an expression of diabolical malignity. "Yes—he is in my shed—that beautiful place I have described to you——"

"Then let us proceed thither quick?" interrupted Harold, who was a prey to the most frightful suspense; but he suddenly bethought himself that it would be more prudent to regain possession of his huge beard—for he knew not how serviceable that main ingredient of his disguise might possibly prove, or how far Chiffin's failure would compromise himself.

He was advancing towards that part of the hedge over which the hag had thrown the beard—when she, divining his intention, burst into so hearty but at the same time so sardonic a fit of merriment, that he became almost furious with rage: and an imprecation burst from his lips.

"It's no use for you to think of getting back that beard of your's," said the hag: "for there's a deep ditch behind the hedge—and into that it has fallen."

"Wretch!" muttered Harold: then seeing how useless it was to vent his rage on the woman, he said, "Come—hasten and lead me to the place where Chiffin is waiting for me."

"This way:"—and the hag at once struck into that very road whence he had been all along expecting to see the Cannibal emerge.

She proceeded at an extraordinary pace, considering her great age, which could scarcely have been less than seventy: and yet it was a sort of hobbling, shambling gait—so that it was a wonder she could get over the ground so fast. Harold followed her close,—his suspense increasing, if possible, and becoming all the more painful the nearer he drew to the place of destination. The walk continued for about half-a-mile; and then, in a small open space by the side of the road, a dilapidated cottage gradually stood out from amidst the obscurity of the hour. But it evidently was not so bad as the hag had represented it: for there was at least one window which had not fallen in—and a light glimmered through it. Harold thought that this could not be the place: but the hag struck out of the road and made straight for the habitation. On this nearer approach, Staunton perceived that it had a door, and that its roof was but partially dilapidated. Indeed, half of the little cottage was alone ruined by the lapse of time; and the other portion was to all appearances perfectly habitable.

"There—walk in," she said, throwing open the door: "and I will leave you alone to settle your affairs with your friend Chiffin."

These last words were uttered with a peculiar irony, which for a moment filled Lord Harold with a vague yet poignant apprehension either of imminent danger, or that the woman was in some way deceiving him. But so desperate was his situation, and so acute his suspense, that he hesitated not for more than a single instant; and crossing the threshold, entered the small and wretched room where the candle was burning. The hag closed the door behind him; and her horrible laugh reached his ears as she hurried away from the place.

But what words can depict the mingled consternation and dismay which seized upon Lord Harold, when instead of finding himself in the presence of Chiffin the Cannibal, he was instantaneously confronted by his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean!

CHAPTER CXXV.

THE UNCLE AND NEPHEW ONCE MORE TOGETHER.

The tale which the half-maniac hag had told the young nobleman in respect to the dreadful murder committed by her three sons, and their execution on the spot where the deed took place forty years back, was strictly true. It was well known at the time that she herself was perfectly innocent of any complicity in that hideous turpitude; and as the event rendered her half-crazy, she became an object of pity on the part of those who knew her. It was true that she had been permitted to continue in the habitation of that cottage; and was supported by the charity of persons dwelling in the neighbourhood. She was wont to call at the country-houses round about, and even at some in the town of Tonbridge itself, to receive broken victuals and an occasional cast-off garment, with now and then some alms in the shape of money: and thus she did not starve. Her mind was to a certain extent upset; and she had told no falsehood when she said that during the hours of darkness she was accustomed to visit the spot where her three sons had suffered for their crime, and where they were interred after hanging in chains for some years.

She was known throughout the district as *Crazy Bet;* and if ever, when posted at the fatal spot, she encountered some benighted wayfarer, she was wont to tell him the story of the dread deed in her own peculiar style; and she appeared to feel a malignant pleasure in the horror and affright which she thus inspired in the minds of the timid. In one sense however she was remarkable for a great degree of shrewdness: she could well recollect anything that was told her; and if occasionally entrusted with a message or a letter by those of whose charity she was a recipient, she never failed to execute the commission with scrupulous punctuality and accuracy.

Many years back, before he quitted England on his self-exile to the Continent, the Marquis of Eagledean, when riding about that part of the country, had frequently fallen in with Crazy Bet; and he was invariably accustomed to bestow upon her some proof of his bounteous commiseration. A few days previously to the period of which we are now writing, and when again happening to ride in this direction, he encountered her; and it was a proof of the woman's extraordinary shrewdness and keenness of penetration, notwithstanding her disordered intellects, that she had at once recognized her former benefactor, the Marquis of Eagledean. Thus did she exhibit a power of perception and a strength of memory which not even any of the former friends and acquaintances of the Marquis had shown: for, as the reader has seen, on his return from Italy under the *incognito* of "Mr Gunthorpe," he was so much altered as almost to defy recognition. Yet this crazy creature *had* recognized him; and he was much struck by the occurrence.

When he had issue forth from his mansion after the adventure with Chiffin the Cannibal, he bent his way on foot in the direction of the spot where the cross-roads met, and which had been indicated to him as the trysting-place for that villain with his unworthy nephew. As we have seen, he had taken the precaution of providing himself with pistols, in case Lord Harold should think of consummating a crime which his agent the Cannibal had failed to perpetrate. The Marquis felt assured that Chiffin would keep his word, and not repair to the spot for which the appointment was given,—inasmuch as it was upon this condition that he was to receive the money in America and a future proof

of Lord Eagledean's liberality. The distance was four miles from the Park to that spot; but when three and a half were accomplished, the Marquis found himself close by the hut which he knew to be tenanted by Crazy Bet. At that instant she was issuing forth from her habitation to pay her wonted visit to the spot where her sons were executed; and an idea at once struck Lord Eagledean.

He thought to himself that if he continued his way to encounter his nephew, the latter might either flee precipitately on recognizing his uncle instead of the Cannibal—or else might make a sudden attack upon him, in which case he would be compelled to discharge his pistols in his own defence. Now, Lord Eagledean could apprehend no catastrophe more fatal to his own peace of mind than that which might render him the slayer of his nephew; and thus, on beholding Crazy Bet, did the idea strike him to which we have above alluded. It was to the effect that he would employ her as a means to bring his nephew face to face with him inside the hut. He knew that Crazy Bet would accurately perform whatsoever commission he might entrust to her, and that of her own accord she was certain to tell her tale in such a manner that would produce an impression of awful horror upon the mind of Harold. In short, the Marquis, comprehending all the dreadful suspense which Harold was sure to feel, foresaw what would be the emotions excited in his mind by a meeting with that crazy hag,—and he therefore concluded that not merely would Staunton be brought by her into his presence, but that he would come with a soul so thoroughly racked by every horrible feeling as to be susceptible of complete prostration when he should find himself face to face with that uncle whose destruction he had sought to compass. Accordingly, the Marquis of Eagledean gave his directions to the old hag,—telling her just sufficient to enable her to drop certain hints and assertions which could not fail to startle Lord Harold and perplex him most cruelly. The reader has seen how well Crazy Bet acquitted herself of her commission—and how she was enabled to gratify that species of malignity which, as the result of her misfortunes, had become interwoven in her nature,—by tearing off a portion of the young nobleman's disguise. It was also consistent with her habit of representing her own condition to be as deplorable as possible, that she should have somewhat exaggerated the misery of her habitation. Finally, she succeeded in inducing Lord Harold to accompany her; and we have seen how fearful was the consternation which seized upon the guilty young nobleman when he found himself confronted by his uncle.

There, then, they met—there, in that wretched sordid little room in which there was scarcely an article of furniture; and even the few things that met the eye, were broken and dilapidated; there, by the light of a flickering candle, did the uncle and the nephew meet face to face. The Marquis wore a stern expression of countenance; and in each hand he held a pistol, the light glimmering upon these weapons and revealing them to the eyes of his graceless nephew. Harold comprehended all in a moment that his worst fears were realized—that Chiffin had failed, or betrayed him—that everything was confessed, and he stood in the presence of his uncle as one who was stamped with the premeditation of murder. Not for an instant did the wretched criminal think of personally attempting any farther villany on his already too much outraged relative; and after standing for a few moments in ghastly dismay, he sank down on his knees exclaiming, "Pardon me—pardon me!"

"Rise, sir," said the Marquis, in a stern tone: "rise—take your stand as far off as the narrow limits of this place will permit—and listen to what I have to say."

Harold obeyed mechanically, and with a most unfeigned and wretched humiliation. He felt that it was indeed the most miserable moment of his existence, and one scarcely to be envied by a felon in the gaol's condemned cell. He dared not look his uncle in the face: but retreating into the farthest corner, stood with downcast eyes—the picture of abject woe!

"Harold," said the Marquis, still speaking sternly, and still grasping his pistols with the air of a man who did not choose for a moment to be off his guard, and who was resolved to punish on the spot any attempt that might be made upon his life,—"Harold, my presence here is to afford you one more chance of redeeming the past. That your own conscience *must*—if you be at all accessible to the slightest spark of proper feeling—for evermore torture you with remorse on account of this tremendous crime which you have sought to have perpetrated by means of an agent who is already a branded murderer,—is but too certain. But still there is a possibility of future atonement——I hope to God I may say, of sincere penitence! This chance I will give you. Nay, do not interrupt me: do not speak! No words that may now come from your lips, can delude me with the idea that you are already repentant. Such speedy penitence follows not upon a plot so insidiously laid and a crime so coldly deliberated. Years of contrition can alone redeem the past. But now, before my final intentions towards you are made known, answer me a few questions. Before, however, I proceed to put them, let me give you to understand that if even at this moment you still entertain a project of a diabolic character against myself, it were most perilous for you to attempt it. At the slightest hostile movement which you were to make, I would shoot you as remorselessly as I would kill a rabid dog. Moreover, you cannot think that I was so imprudent as to trust myself in the presence of such as you, even though armed with these weapons. If I raise my voice, there are those sufficiently near at hand to rush forward, and either save your uncle or at least capture his assassin."

As the reader knows full well, this assertion on the part of Lord Eagledean was not correct; but he felt it necessary thus completely to overawe and intimidate the mind of his nephew who had already shown such a dreadful aptitude for crime. Harold groaned in the bitterness of his spirit—but said not a word; he was completely discomfited—crushed—broken down.

"Now," continued the Marquis, "the first question I have to put to you, is whether this fiend-like project was initiated by yourself—or whether it was instigated by that she-devil, Lady Saxondale? Answer truly: for I shall be able to judge whether you speak with accuracy."

"On my soul," exclaimed Harold, with passionate vehemence, "I should not have thought of it had I not encountered that detestable woman at Beauvais. I was acting, at the time, in obedience to your commands—I was following your instructions to the very letter,—travelling quietly and unostentatiously upon the Continent. I had even halted at Beauvais merely for the purpose of pursuing some recreating sport in the neighbourhood——"

"I understand—and you met Lady Saxondale," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean: "and she put this execrable project into your head—and she instructed you where to find a fitting instrument for its execution—and more than that, she furnished you with the means of taking life by a prompt and inevitable process. It was *her* bottle of poison which you sought in the room at Saxondale Castle. Is not all this correct?"

"It was so—it was so," ejaculated Harold, literally writhing with the agony of his thoughts.

"And has it never struck you, then," inquired the Marquis, "that Lady Saxondale is perhaps a murderess herself?"

"Ah!"—and Harold gave a sudden start, while his countenance grew more ghastly, if possible, than it was before.

"Yes—I see that the idea has struck you," said Lord Eagledean. "Doubtless you remember with what extraordinary suddenness a domestic in her service—Mabel Stewart, I think was the name I read in the newspapers at the time——"

"Ah!" again ejaculated Harold: but now it was with a certain feeling of relief; for he had fancied that his uncle meant to touch upon another topic. "Yes, yes," he cried, snatching with avidity at this unexpected turn which Lord Eagledean's discourse had thus taken: "I do remember now—but it never struck me before."

"There can be no doubt of it!" said the Marquis. "That woman is a murderess—and for some mysterious reason of her own, she poisoned her dependant. But to her conscience must she be left for punishment: I can see no means of bringing her guilt directly home to her. Now, Harold Staunton, consider the position in which you have placed yourself,—imbibing the instigations of a murderess to become a murderer! Providence has interposed to save you from the commission of this foul deed. The vile tool whom you employed, confessed everything; and for your sake I have not surrendered him up to justice. By this time he is far away from the neighbourhood; and he will go to a foreign land. You also will at once set out for another country: but it is not to France that you shall return;—there must be no opportunity afforded for you to fall in again with that woman who for purposes of evil has obtained such an empire over you. No—it is to Sweden that you shall proceed; and at Stockholm will you fix your residence. There will I cause to be paid quarterly, the income I promised when a few weeks back you went to France. The amount will be periodically handed over to you, on personal application only, at a banker's in Stockholm: the money will not be paid to your written order. Now, Harold, you will lose no time in repairing to London and embarking for Sweden. This last chance do I give you. If you be heard of or seen in England until such time as I think fit to authorize your return, I will at once stop the sources of your income, and will take active measures to punish you in a more serious manner. That you may not think I threaten without power to carry my menace into execution, I remind you that if I were to apply to the Court of Chancery to cut off the entail of the Eagledean estates—and if I were to adduce as a ground for the application, all the incidents of your atrocious conduct and meditated crimes,—let me remind you, I say, that such application would not be in vain, and that you would find yourself in a condition of the most abject pauperism. What then would be your fate? Shunned by the whole world—execrated as a monster who sought to commit the most diabolical of crimes—your very name spoken even by your nearest relatives with loathing and abhorrence—dragging your miserable existence through the odium, the hate, and the disgust of all acquainted with your misdeeds,—without even the possession of wealth to cheer you,—what, I ask, would become of you *then*? But if you faithfully and truly follow out the course which I have laid down, I shall hold your obedience to my will as a progressive atonement for the past. From your aunt and your sister will I keep your wickedness concealed,—so that some years hence, when as an altered man you return to this country, you may still be received with open arms by them."

Lord Harold was about to speak: fervid assurances of implicit obedience to his uncle's will, were on the point of issuing from the lips of the crushed and spirit-broken young nobleman;—but the Marquis waved his hand imperiously to command silence.

"Promise me nothing," he said, still coldly and sternly: "I want proofs — not words. Heaven send that you may appreciate the leniency now shown you! Depart:—I have no more to say. Depart, Harold—and may the incidents of the last few hours operate as a terrible warning and as an efficient example."

Again did the Marquis of Eagledean wave his hand in a peremptory manner; and his miserable nephew slunk away from his presence.

CHAPTER CXXVI.

EDMUND'S BRIDE.

ABOUT five years previous to the date of which we are writing, the whole fashionable world of Paris was suddenly excited by the appearance in that brilliant sphere of a beautiful young English girl, named Adelaide Horton. She was then nineteen years of age, and of a loveliness so transcending as to ravish the hearts and bewilder the imagination of all beholders of the male sex—while the ladies felt even their jealousy triumphed over by the loftier feeling of interest which her presence inspired. She was represented to be an orphan, and came to Paris, accompanied by an aunt, who made no pretence of possessing any great means; nor did she hesitate to confess to the acquaintances she formed, that her niece was entirely portionless. But for one of such radiant charms a brilliant marriage might be expected; and no doubt

this was the hope of the aunt, who seemed to be much attached to her young relative.

Adelaide was as accomplished as she was beautiful: her manners were amiable—her disposition appeared to be good—and in her intercourse with the society to which she was at once introduced on her appearance in Paris, her bearing was marked with the most modest propriety. She spoke the French language with all the fluency of a native; and for one of her quick intelligence, it was easy to attain in a comparatively short period, the fashionable Parisian accent.

Adelaide Horton found all the male sex her admirers; and amongst them she had soon several suitors. At first she appeared to give no encouragement to any one in particular: but after a while it was whispered that the young and handsome Count de St. Gerard had made an impression on the heart of the English beauty. The aunt was however, with all her attachment for her niece, a worldly-minded woman; and on privately instituting certain inquiries, she ascertained that though the Count was in the present enjoyment of a considerable estate, yet that his possession thereof was the subject of litigation; and that if the decision of the tribunals should be against him, he would be reduced to comparative poverty. It was known therefore by the most intimate friends of the aunt, that she set her face against the attachment which her niece had formed; and in a few weeks the old lady's worldly forethought was justified by the circumstance of a hostile judgment against Count de St. Gerard, and the sudden alienation of this young nobleman's property. He immediately quitted Paris; and whether any private interview took place between him and Adelaide Horton, was not known to her aunt and friends.

A very few weeks after this occurrence the

fashionable world of the French capital was startled by the announcement that the beautiful English lady had consented to bestow her hand upon the Baron de Charlemont. This gentleman had served with great distinction in the French army, and had risen to the rank of General. He was rich—but was mutilated with many wounds; and was sixty years of age. He had never been a handsome, nor even a fine man; and a scar upon his face had rendered him even more repulsive than he naturally was. That Adelaide should consent to be sacrificed to such an individual, naturally caused considerable astonishment, even in a sphere where young damsels when portionless were wont to become the wives of men old enough to be their grandfathers. For it was thought that the English tastes and notions of Adelaide would have rendered her averse to such an alliance. However, it was of course set down to the successful manœuvrings of the aunt; and the Baron de Charlemont, though usually a man of reserved habits, and whose only pride seemed to consist in the gallant deeds associated with his name, appeared immensely elated at the triumph he had obtained over the numerous rival competitors for the young lady's hand. It must however be observed that of all these competitors he was decidedly the richest,—though there were men of a loftier rank who were sighing at Adelaide's feet: but then in France, aristocratic titles were held in the time of King Louis-Philippe in much less estimation than the possession of wealth.

Adelaide Horton accompanied the Baron de Charlemont to the altar, and became the mistress of her husband's splendid mansion in the Rue de Tournon. She was twenty when she thus married; and it was consequently four years previously to the date which our tale has properly reached. After her union she mingled in society as usual: her manner was as gay and affable as ever; and people wondered how she could so soon have forgotten the handsome and elegant Count de St. Gerard. For two years did her married life last; and never once did the breath of scandal whisper a syllable against her name. Her conduct was marked by every appearance of the strictest propriety; and this also excited some little degree of surprise on the part of the Parisians,—inasmuch as with a husband of the Baron's age and personal appearance, if she had bestowed her favours upon a lover, she would not have been blamed nor have lost her social position: that is to say, as long as outward decency was not flagrantly violated. But there was not even the faintest suspicion that the Baroness de Charlemont indulged in any such amour. On the contrary, it was very well known that she had rebuked with dignified indignation several overtures that were made to her by the handsome and dissipated youths of the Parisian aristocracy.

Thus did two years pass away after the marriage of Adelaide with the Baron de Charlemont. No issue resulted from the alliance; and we must observe that the aunt resided with her niece and the Baron at the mansion in the Rue de Tournon.

One evening, at the expiration of those two years, a female—poorly clad, and with a thick veil over her countenance—entered the shop of a chemist in an obscure quarter of Paris, and one of the most remote from that in which the Rue de Tournon was situated. Addressing herself to a lad about eighteen—the chemist's son, who was serving behind the counter—she inquired for some prussic acid. The youth questioned her as to the use she intended to make of it,—at the same time representing that the French laws were very stringent against the sale of all poisons, and that it specially behoved him to be cautious in dispensing one of that deadly character. She answered in a firm and collected tone, that her husband was making chemical experiments, and that he required prussic acid for the purpose: she likewise gave a name and address, which the youth wrote down in a book: but still he hesitated, not liking the manner in which she kept the veil over her countenance. She appeared to treat the matter with considerable indifference,—saying that if he disliked to serve her, she would go elsewhere. The chemist was very poor: money was a great object: the youth knew his father's necessities—and acceded to the woman's request. She received the phial of poison, paid the sum demanded, and walked coolly and deliberately out of the shop,—as if conscious of no evil intent, and not caring if she were followed.

Almost immediately after she had quitted the shop, the chemist himself entered from an inner parlour; and his son told him what had taken place. The old man was very angry that the poison had been served,—representing that if any evil consequences ensued, the rigours of the law might be visited upon them both. He instantly demanded in which direction the woman went on leaving the shop?—and the son then recollected (for it had not struck him before) that she proceeded in a contrary way from the address which she had given.

"You would recognise her again?" said the father: "run in pursuit—and if you overtake her, insist upon having the phial back and on returning the money. I will in the meantime speed to the address which she has given: for if it be the correct one, she may have sought it by a circuitous route, having perhaps other purchases to make."

The father and son accordingly sallied forth, each taking a separate direction. The father, on reaching the address indicated, found—as he had already more than half suspected—that no such person was known there; and that no female at all answering the description of the veiled one, had ever been seen at the house. On the other hand, the youth sped rapidly along in the direction which the female had taken; and at the end of a couple of streets he perceived her by the light of the lamps turning round a corner. At the very moment he overtook her, a gust of wind blew aside her veil; and he caught a glimpse of her countenance: but as the veil was instantaneously replaced—and, as he thought, in a hurried and excited manner—that glimpse was of the most transient character. Nevertheless, the impression which at once settled upon his mind, was to the effect that it was a countenance of exceeding beauty, with a mass of light or golden hair gathered up on each side. Nor less did it strike him with the same rapidity, that the female was purposely disguised in that mean attire, and that her distinguished look but ill assorted with such apparel. Catching her by the arm, he said quickly, "Pardon me, madam—but it is necessary I should

speak to you; and if you would avoid scandal and disturbance, I pray you to return quietly to the shop you have so recently left."

The lady had stopped short on being thus clutched and thus addressed: the chemist's son felt by her arm that she was trembling violently—and indeed, veiled though she were, it was evident that her whole form was thus agitated. But quickly recovering herself, she said in a voice that sounded cold and composed, though low, "I live close by. Come with me—and I will do whatsoever you desire."

"But, madam," at once responded the chemist's son "you are proceeding in a contrary direction to the address which you ere now gave me."

"That is quite true," she rejoined, in the same collected manner: "but I had other purchases to make. I have a friend living close at hand; we will proceed thither: and then you can not only explain yourself, but I will convince you that I am of the highest respectability."

"Madam," replied the youth, "what I require to be done can be accomplished in a single moment. Give me back the phial, and receive your money in return."

"Fool!" suddenly ejaculated the stranger lady, who during this brief and hurried colloquy, had taken something from beneath her shawl with the hand that was disengaged: for the chemist's son still retained a firm grasp on her right wrist: and at the same instant that she uttered that word, some powder was thrown in his eyes, which naturally made him start with the sudden pain.

The lady burst away from him: he shouted for the police, while wiping his eyes with his handkerchief: a crowd soon gathered around him—he gave a hurried description of the female's appearance—and several persons set off in every direction in pursuit. But all attempts to overtake her were unavailing; and meanwhile the young man had been conducted into a house close by, where water was furnished for him to bathe his eyes. It was some innocuous powder that had been thus thrown; and beyond the temporary pain, he experienced no farther annoyance therefrom. On returning home, he recounted to his father all that had occurred; and he then learnt that the address given by the purchaser of the poison, was false. The old chemist deemed it prudent to repair without delay to the Prefect of Police, and narrate the entire particulars; and this functionary consented, under all circumstances, to forbear from instituting any penal proceedings against the chemist's son.

It would appear that the Prefect had not the slightest conception who could be the female that had purchased the poison. He consulted half-a-dozen of his most experienced agents, and those who were best acquainted with the personal appearance of ladies moving in the fashionable sphere: but as a matter of course there were more than one, and more even than fifty, with light or golden air whom these agents recollected in a moment; and it was therefore impossible to fix upon any one in particular. For several days afterwards the chemist's son accompanied one of the agents to all the most fashionable resorts, to see if he could recognise and point out any lady resembling her who had purchased the poison: but this endeavour likewise proved unavailing.

Six weeks passed away; and the occurrence ceased to be thought of by the few to whose knowledge it had come. We should however observe that not a single line relative thereto had found its way into the public journals,—so that the female who purchased the poison, might be supposed to have remained unaware of the proceedings thus taken to discover her.

It was in the middle of the night, at the expiration of this interval of six weeks, that the household of the Baron de Charlemont was suddenly alarmed by the violent ringing of the bells communicating with the chamber occupied by that nobleman and his wife. The principal lady's-maid was the first to answer the summons; and she was met on the threshold of the chamber by the Baroness, who seemed in a violent state of agitation, and desired her to hasten and arouse her aunt immediately, as the Baron was seized with apoplexy. Another maid, who immediately after made her appearance, was directed to bid one of the men-servants run instantaneously and fetch medical assistance; for that the Baron appeared to be dying. Both of these maids perceived a strong odour of vinegar and perfume in the chamber; and they of course concluded that the Baroness had been applying restoratives to her husband. The aunt speedily reached the chamber, where she found her niece apparently in a fainting state, and the Baron de Charlemont lying a corpse in the bed. The aunt herself was so dreadfully shocked that for some minutes she required from the female-servants who gathered in the room, as much assistance as her niece. But at length, by the time the medical man arrived, they were both somewhat restored to self-possession. The Baroness seemed to be much affected: but there was nothing so unnaturally frenzied in her grief as to give it the air of being assumed and over-done. On the contrary—as subsequently described by the witnesses thereof—it appeared the natural ebullition of a young wife's feelings, when so rudely and suddenly deprived of a husband who, if he possessed not her love, at all events had gained her esteem and gratitude by his kindness towards her. In short, it was represented to be just that species of affliction which was likely to be shown under circumstances where there could not be any fervid or impassioned love. When sufficiently composed to give an account of the tragedy, the narrative of the Baroness amounted to these particulars:—

On retiring to rest, the Baron had complained of an uneasy feeling and dizziness in the head—a fact corroborated by his valet, who had assisted him to undress in a room adjoining the bedchamber: but after he had sought his couch, he felt somewhat better. In the middle of the night the Baroness, who slept lightly, was awakened by hearing her husband groan: she started up—and by the light burning in the room, perceived that he was in a fit. She instantaneously applied such restoratives as were at hand—or at least which she believed to be calculated to have that effect: and finding that he was rapidly becoming worse, she rang the bells to arouse the household. In the interval, however, between the appearance of the two maids and the coming of her aunt, her husband expired.

The medical man attributed the death to apo-

plexy, of which there was every symptom in the appearance of the corpse; and the proper notification in cases of sudden death was sent to the police, there being no coroner's inquest in France. This notice was forwarded at about nine o'clock in the morning; and on being communicated at the head-quarters of the Prefecture, it immediately struck one of the functionaries there, who was personally acquainted with the Baroness, that she corresponded in stature and in the hue of her hair with the description given by the chemist's son of the female who had purchased the poison six weeks back. The medical man above-mentioned, was instantaneously communicated with; and on hearing what was explained to him, he said that a person being poisoned by prussic acid, would present such an appearance as the corpse of the Baron de Charlemont. It was then ascertained who the undertaker was, to whom instructions were given for the funeral,—these instructions having been already issued, inasmuch as interments are enjoined by the French laws to take place with the least possible delay after death. The undertaker being found, it was arranged that on some pretence he should call at the mansion, as if for farther instructions; and that he should be accompanied by the chemist's son, whom he might introduce as one of his own men. The proceeding was conducted with all this delicacy, so that the feelings of the widowed Baroness might not be wounded in case it should transpire that she was not the purchaser of the poison, and that suspicion was erroneously directed against her.

These matters were all arranged with the characteristic celerity of the French police; and at about noon on the day following the night of the death, the undertaker, accompanied by the chemist's son, was introduced to the presence of the Baroness. She was seated alone in a drawing-room where she had just been giving orders to a milliner for her mourning; and she appeared to be much afflicted. When the undertaker and his companion made their appearance, the latter could not repress an ejaculation as the conviction smote him that this was the lady who had purchased the poison: but the Baroness herself seemed not to recognise him—neither did it appear that she heard the ejaculation which had fallen from his lips, or that she was in the slightest degree troubled at his presence. The undertaker put some questions—received the answer—and withdrew, followed by his companion.

In the immediate neighbourhood of the Rue de Tournon a magistrate was waiting with some *gendarmes*, to act if necessary; and on receiving the information brought by the chemist's son, these officials at once repaired to the mansion. On being introduced to the room where they found the Baroness, she appeared more amazed and indignant than troubled at their presence; and when the magistrate announced to her that he had come to arrest her on the charge of poisoning her husband, she burst into tears, but repelled the accusation with every appearance of outraged innocence. The news spread like wildfire through the spacious mansion: the aunt came rushing half-frantic into the room; and embracing her niece with passionate vehemence, proclaimed her conviction that the charge was as false as it was atrocious. The Baroness besought her relative to compose her feelings, with the assurance that her guiltlessness would soon become apparent.

She was not immediately removed to prison—but merely placed under the strictest *surveillance*, while a surgical examination of the body took place. This was at once proceeded with: it occupied several hours—and the three medical men who performed it, could not agree in their opinion. Two expressed their conviction that the deceased had come by his death by prussic acid; and of these, one was the medical attendant who in the first instance had declared it was apoplexy from natural causes. The third surgeon dissented from the idea of poison, and held that the opinion originally delivered by the attendant of the family, was the correct one. However, the result was that in the evening the Baroness de Charlemont was committed to prison: and the affair created an immense sensation in the fashionable world of Paris.

Six weeks elapsed before the trial took place; and during this interval the accused Baroness maintained the utmost fortitude, mingled with a grief which appeared perfectly natural, for the loss of her husband and the dreadful crime with which she was charged. Her aunt visited her daily, although she had received such a shock that her health was rapidly giving way. In the meantime the papers of the deceased Baron had been examined; and it was found that he had very recently been speculating largely in mines, which had turned out a complete failure, and in which the bulk of his fortune was swallowed up. From certain entries in a memorandum-book which he kept, it appeared that his wife was cognizant of these speculations and losses; and this circumstance was considered as telling in her favour,—inasmuch as it could not be to possess herself of the sole and absolute control over a large fortune that she had put her husband to death; for the bulk thereof was gone, and the widow's pension to which she would be entitled, was infinitely inferior to his pay as a General in the Army. Therefore, in a pecuniary sense, she was cutting her own throat by making away with her husband.

The day of the trial arrived; and the Court was crowded to excess. The Baroness, apparelled in her widow's weeds, was conducted into the dock by two *gendarmes;* but she was allowed to remain seated during the proceedings. She was exceedingly pale—and therefore all the more interestingly beautiful. For some time after she entered the hall of justice, she remained with her eyes bent downward,—not once throwing a single glance in the direction of the seats filled with so many of her fashionable acquaintances. Her aunt was not present: the excitement and suspense she had hitherto endured, had at length completely prostrated her on a bed of sickness. The King's Procurator opened the proceedings, detailing the facts already known to the reader, and which had tended to accumulate the burden of suspicion upon the head of the prisoner. In speaking of the alleged tragedy itself, the public functionary made use of the following observations:—

"Supposing the charges set out in the indictment to be correct, it is for the imagination to penetrate into that death-chamber, at that deep midnight hour when the deed was accomplished, and to mark step by step the proceedings of the ac-

cused. Thus following the suggestions of conjecture, we may suppose that the fatal poison was dropped between the lips of a sleeping husband, and that vinegar and strong perfumes were profusely poured upon his head and purposely allowed to flow upon the bed-clothes, in order to absorb the strong odour of the prussic acid. Then, this being done, it is easy to conceive how a certain part had to be played, in order to avert suspicion from the guilty heroine of that stupendous tragedy. To put on an air of violent agitation and to ring the bells furiously, were the first expedients which in such a case would be naturally resorted to. Then the accused meets at the threshold those who first hurry in response to that alarming summons. The position of the door prevents these maids from observing that it is an already lifeless corpse which occupies the bed:—they are made to believe that the Baron still lives—they are sent on separate errands—a few minutes elapse before the aunt reaches the chamber—by this time the part of the accused is sufficiently played—it is no longer necessary for her to conceal that all is over. Ah, gentlemen of the jury, I fear that all was over many minutes before that aunt's presence there,—that all was over when the fatal drop of poison was placed upon the tongue of a victim who thus suddenly passed from the sleep of life into that which death forbids from waking. But you will be told, gentlemen of the jury, that the grief of the Baroness was too natural to be assumed—that her manner, when arrested, was that of an innocent person outraged by a charge as erroneous as it was foul—and that her demeanour during the period of her captivity, has been all consistent with this conscious guiltlessness. You are not to be led away by these representations. The human mind is of many varieties; and there are some which, endowed with extraordinary strength, as well as being subjected to the control of a powerful will, may be regulated and made pliant to suit all circumstances. Such a mind as this may enable its possessor to play on a particular part until the end. A manifestation of fortitude is no more an evidence of outraged innocence, than a complete sinking into despondency should be taken as a proof of guilt. Some minds sustain themselves boldly throughout a career of crime: while others, really innocent, sink crushed and broken beneath the slightest imputation of guilt. Then, too, gentlemen of the jury, you will be told that the accused had no earthly reason for committing such a crime—that by the death of her husband she frustrated the chance of his shattered fortunes being retrieved—and that she reduced herself to comparative poverty on a widow's pension, whereas, had he lived, she might still have shared the liberal revenue enjoyed by a General-officer. You will be told, too, that her conduct as a woman and a wife has been unexceptionable—that the breath of suspicion has never tainted her fame—and that it could not therefore be to enjoy without restraint the embraces of a paramour, she had been led to the perpetration of such a crime. But it is not for you to set yourselves up as judges of motives: you have to decide upon the evidence of facts. How many secret springs are there in the human mind, which remain concealed from general observation, and which it is impossible to fathom! How many incidents have we on record of great deeds of turpitude—known and unmistakably proven—which were committed without any apparent motive! But perhaps, when the presiding judge shall interrogate the prisoner, it may transpire that she had a motive—or at least *a hope*, in doing this deed,—supposing, according to the terms of the indictment, that she did really perpetrate it. There are incidents where first affections have been blighted—where a marriage has taken place with another than with him whose image filled the heart—and where the husband has been immolated in the hope that after due time a second marriage may put that heart in possession of its long-cherished object. I do not say that such is the case in the present instance: but I believe that I am not altogether without a justifiable ground for making the allusions just spoken."

The speech of the King's Procurator, which lasted four hours, produced an immense sensation in the Court; and many who had come thither in the belief of the Baroness de Charlemont's innocence, had their faith considerably shaken: while others, still more easily led away by the power of forensic oratory, were turned altogether against her. Whatsoever emotions were passing in her mind, could not be conjectured by the audience generally; inasmuch as throughout the Procurator's address she kept her eyes bent down, and her features were thus concealed by the front of the dock. But now came the interrogatory of the prisoner by the presiding judge—a feature in French criminal proceedings totally unknown to our English tribunals. The Baroness stood up: not a single glance did she turn towards the auditory: her eyes were fixed on the judicial bench. Her demeanour was firm and collected—but her cheeks were pale; and indeed it was impossible that she could have done otherwise than feel much inwardly: for it was a matter of life or death to her—and that death, if pronounced as her doom, to be inflicted by the guillotine!

The President proceeded to question her in the usual manner,—first of all inquiring her age and maiden name, the country to which she belonged, and the date of her marriage. He then asked whether she were acquainted with a certain Count de St. Gerard? When this question was put, a breathless silence reigned on the part of the auditory: the deepest suspense prevailed. A few moments elapsed before the Baroness answered the query; and then she replied in the affirmative. The President next inquired whether she had not at one time experienced a certain affection for that young nobleman? To this demand an affirmative response was likewise given; and now the voice of the Baroness trembled audibly. She was asked under what circumstances she was led to marry the Baron de Charlemont, when her heart inclined towards another?

"I was poor—and the Baron was rich," answered Adelaide, her voice again trembling, and now with a still more visible emotion. "My aunt, to whom I was under the utmost obligations, was likewise poor. I should have made no sacrifice of the feelings to procure the enjoyment of riches for myself: but I was prepared to make every sacrifice on account of my aunt."

"Then you consider that you were making sacrifice," inquired the President, "by espousing the Baron de Charlemont?"

"Should I be believed," exclaimed Adelaide, with much emotion, "if I were to assert the contrary? No—it would be against nature! I did consider it a sacrifice; and the world must have regarded me as a victim. But I accepted my destiny; and when I once became the wife of an honourable man, I resolved to fulfil my duties faithfully. Nay—I can scarcely say that I resolved; because *that* would be to imply that I had deliberated upon the subject—and to deliberate would have been to waver. What I mean is, that when I once entered the marriage-state, I accepted all its holiest obligations; and the prosecuting counsel has done me the justice to admit that I never have been accused of violating them."

This speech, brief though it were, was very effective, and produced a reaction of opinion on behalf of the accused. Perhaps too, her exquisite beauty, which was set off at the moment by the re-appearance of the flushing roses upon her cheeks, helped to create that renewed sympathy: at least it was so with the male portion of the auditory.

"Now, Adelaide Horton," said the President,—for in France the prisoner under such circumstances would be addressed by her maiden name,—"answer me this question: how long is it since you saw the Count de St. Gerard?"

"Some weeks previously to my marriage with the Baron de Charlemont," replied the accused, "I beheld the Count de St. Gerard for the last time."

Here the counsel engaged for Adelaide's defence, rose and addressing the tribunal consisting of three judges, said, "Gentlemen, anticipating that such a question would be put, we have taken pains to procure evidence to the effect that the Count de St. Gerard has not set foot in Paris—nor has he indeed been within fifty leagues of the capital—for upwards of two years past. Here is an affidavit to that effect, made by the Count de St. Gerard, and attested before the proper authorities at Strasbourg."

The paper being duly handed in, the interrogatory was resumed,—the President now asking the Baroness whether she had purchased poison at the chemist's house—whether she had ever disguised herself in mean apparel unbecoming her station——whether she had ever seen the chemist's son previous to the occasion on which he presented himself at her mansion in company with the undertaker?—to all which questions Adelaide replied firmly in the negative.

"I have now," said the President, "but one more question to ask—and it is an important one. The indictment specifies that at nine o'clock in the evening of the 20th of August, 1842, you visited the chemist's house under certain circumstances. If this be the case, you must have been away from your own home for at least an hour. The question I have to ask is this—What were you doing with yourself on that particular evening from nine to ten o'clock? and can you prove how you passed that interval?"

"I dined with my deceased husband and my aunt," responded Adelaide, "at seven o'clock. At eight we retired to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards I was seized with a violent headache, and retired to my own chamber, where I lay down and fell into a deep sleep. At about half-past ten I was aroused by one of the maids, who entered to see if I required anything."

The President had no farther question to put; and it was evident that the response to this last query was deemed unsatisfactory by the audience,—the tide of suspicion once more setting in strongly against the Baroness de Charlemont. As to what the judges and the jury thought of the matter, it was impossible to glean from their grave and unchanging countenances. The trial was suspended for half-an-hour, during which interval the prisoner was transferred to a private apartment in the Palace of Justice; and when the proceedings were resumed, the examination of the witnesses for the prosecution commenced.

The chemist's son was the first thus called upon; and he recited the facts already known to the reader: but when cross-examined, he admitted that during the six weeks which had elapsed since the Baroness was taken into custody, he had on three or four occasions said to his father, "Good heavens! what if after all I should be mistaken as to the identity of this lady with the woman who purchased the poison? I should be the means of sending an innocent being to the scaffold!" Nevertheless, when re-examined by the Royal Procurator, he affirmed his belief that the prisoner in the dock was really and truly the same who had purchased the poison; and he attributed his occasional wavering to a certain nervous excitement which all these extraordinary proceedings had produced. His father was the second witness examined: but all that he had to depose, was the circumstance of making an inquiry at the address given by the female who purchased the poison, and finding that address to be a false one.

The third witness called for the prosecution, was the principal lady's-maid of the Baroness de Charlemont. She deposed that on the evening already particularized as to date, she perfectly well recollected the prisoner ascending to her own chamber a little before nine o'clock, and complaining to the witness, who was in that chamber at the time, of a very severe headache. The Baroness said she should lie down and endeavour to sleep: whereupon the witness withdrew. Some little time afterwards—it might have been perhaps an hour—witness again ascended to the chamber-door, and knocked, thinking that possibly her mistress might require something. No answer was returned: she tried the handle of the door—but found that it was locked inside; and therefore concluding that her ladyship was sleeping, she retired. Adjoining that chamber was the Baron's dressing-room, which communicated with another chamber, known as the Baron's private apartment; and this had likewise a door opening into a passage, whence a private staircase led down into a small garden; and from this garden there was a back entrance into the Rue de Grenelle, which is behind the Rue de Tournon, running parallel with it. The witness did not however endeavour to penetrate into her mistress's chamber by passing through that already described as the Baron's private apartment: she could not therefore say whether the door of this private apartment was also locked. At about half-past ten or a quarter to eleven on the night in question, she ascended again to her mistress's chamber she knocked—and in a few moments the door

was unlocked. The Baroness appeared to have just wakened up from slumber; and she had on precisely the same dress in which she had dined. When cross-examined, the lady's-maid deposed that she had never seen any apparel of a mean nature, or which could serve as a disguise, in the possession of the Baroness: but there were several drawers which the Baroness was wont to keep locked, and to which she (witness) had not access.

This same witness and another maid were examined as to the manner in which they were summoned by the violent ringing of the bell on the night in question; and when cross-examined, they both declared that the grief of their mistress appeared most natural,—not violent nor over-strained—but just such a kind of sorrow as under the circumstances she might have been supposed to experience; and they had not the faintest suspicion of foul play until the arrest took place, this circumstance striking them with the suddenness of a thunder-clap.

The deposition made by the aunt, and taken down by the examining magistrate when the case was first brought before him, was read by the clerk of the court; and it testified to facts already known to the reader. Then followed the examination of the three surgical witnesses. Two of them persevered in their opinion that death had been produced by prussic acid: the third still held to a contrary belief. This was one of the most interesting portions of the remarkable trial, and occupied some time.

Then began the speech for the defence, one of the most able advocates of the French bar having been retained for the Baroness de Charlemont. He dwelt with emphasis and eloquence upon all the salient points that told in her favour—the absence of any possible motive for the perpetration of such a crime—the positive injury which she would have done herself in a pecuniary sense by removing the husband on whose life depended so large a portion of the revenue she enjoyed in common with him—the fact that the chemist's son had so frequently expressed his dread lest he should have been mistaken in a matter of personal identity—the non-discovery of those articles of mean clothing which she was represented to have worn, and the difficulty of having disposed of such raiment during the short interval between her return from the chemist's (as charged in the indictment) and the ransacking of all her drawers and boxes by the police immediately after the arrest. The learned counsel animadverted strongly upon the attempt of the Royal Procurator to create the impression that a murder of a husband had been committed in the hope that the way would thus be cleared for marriage with the object of the prisoner's first affections. He insisted that it was an important circumstance in the prisoner's favour that she had never seen the Count de St. Gerard, nor communicated with him, since her marriage,—as proved by that nobleman's affidavit. In respect to the endeavour on the part of the prosecution to show that the prisoner could not prove how she had disposed of her time from nine o'clock until half-past ten on the night in question, that endeavour had completely failed: for the inference to be drawn from the testimony of the principal lady's-maid, was that her mistress, having locked herself in her chamber to prevent intrusion, had slept during the whole time. The learned counsel then proceeded to dissect with much skill the surgical evidence which had been tendered—insisting that it was not even satisfactorily shown that the Baron de Charlemont was murdered at all; and that as there was clearly a doubt upon this point, the prisoner was entitled to the benefit thereof. He concluded a long and eloquent speech by calling upon the jury to acquit the Baroness, and relieve her from an imputation which could not be possibly sustained.

Three or four witnesses for the defence were called. One was the magistrate who had effected the arrest, and who frankly admitted that the conduct of the prisoner on the occasion was unlike that of a guilty person. He also deposed to having instituted the most rigorous search throughout the mansion and the garden—but that he had neither discovered the phial which was alleged to have been sold by the chemist, nor any article of the humble raiment which the purchaser of the poison was described to have worn. The gaol authorities were examined, and they spoke to the demeanour of the Baroness during the six weeks of her imprisonment. Some of the late Baron's papers were put in to show that his wife was acquainted with his pecuniary circumstances, and therefore knew what would be the consequence, in this respect, of making away with him. It was likewise shown on the testimony of the valet, that the Baron had complained of illness ere retiring to rest on the night of his death.

The King's Procurator rose to reply, and briefly repeated many of his former arguments, as well as answering those of the counsel for the defence. When he had concluded, the Judges retired to deliberate upon the summing-up; and after an absence of nearly an hour from the court, they returned—when the President delivered his address to the Jury. He was an upright and conscientious Judge, and carefully avoided suffering the Jury to perceive what was the impression of the bench. He pointed out all the facts that told for or against the prisoner; and though the summing-up was perfectly impartial, yet from the analyzation of the circumstances themselves it might be pronounced more favourable than otherwise to the Baroness.

The President ceased; and the jury withdrew to deliberate. It was now eight o'clock in the evening—the lamps were lighted in the court—a profound silence reigned. The auditory, amongst which were so many of the fashionable world of Paris, had remained in the judgment-hall the whole day, so intense was the interest excited by this remarkable trial. A careful study of the most expressive countenances would have shown that the general opinion was adverse to the Baroness de Charlemont—but yet that the jury could scarcely convict upon the evidence as it stood. And she—the accused — that beautiful creature of only twenty-two years of age — apparelled in her widow's-weeds,—there she sat in the ignominious dock, her countenance concealed from the general view. But every one knew full well that powerful emotions must be agitating in her bosom, and that she must feel that her life depended upon the *fiat* about to be pronounced by a majority of the twelve men who had retired from the jury-box.

At length the door behind that box opened: one

by one the jury reappeared, each resuming his seat with a solemn gravity of countenance;—and yet there was something in the looks of several which enabled keen physiognomists to conjecture what the verdict would be. All uncertainty on the subject was soon at an end: the decision was in favour of the Baroness de Charlemont, who was accordingly pronounced *not guilty*.

No applause followed this verdict: though every one present felt it was a decision rendered on the safe side, yet it seemed unsatisfactory. None of Adelaide's brilliant accquaintances stepped forward to grasp her hand and offer congratulations. One individual alone addressed her thus; and that was her own counsel. She sat for nearly a minute in the dock after the verdict was delivered: she sat as if turned into a statue! Then she rose slowly; and without turning a single look upon the audience, as slowly quitted the court.

CHAPTER CXXVII.

THE BRIDEGROOM AND BRIDE.

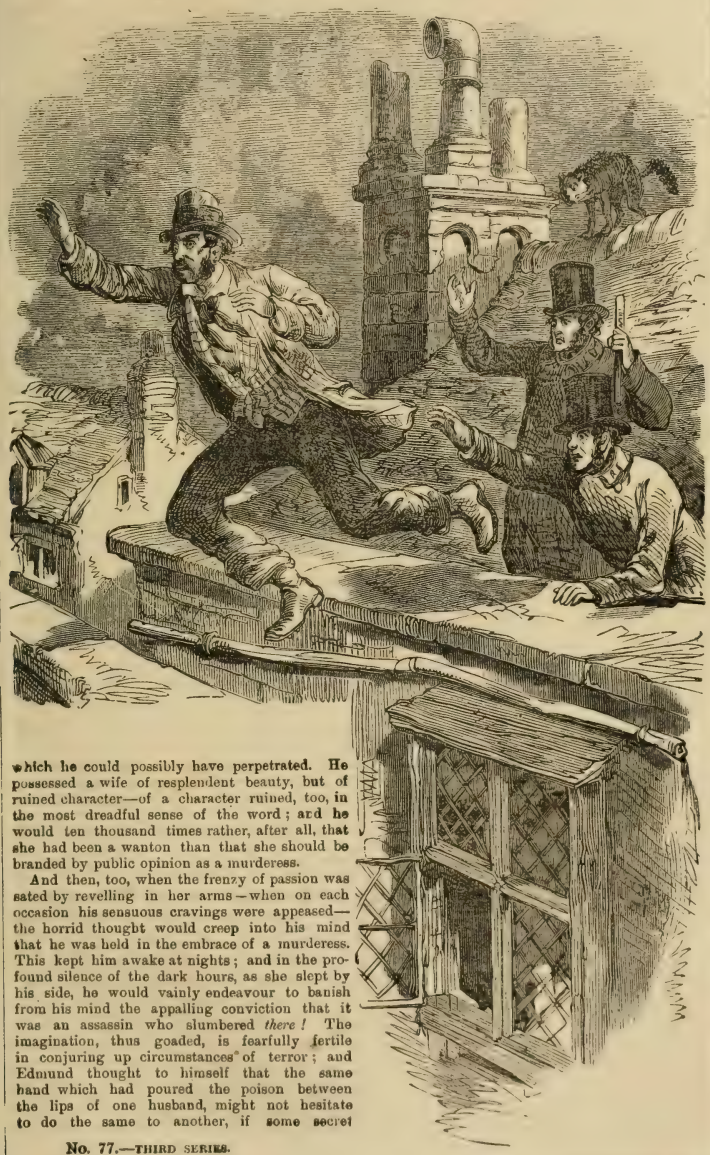
THE reader will recollect that it was after the bridal ceremony in the church of St. George's, Hanover Square, that Lord Saxondale learnt from his valet that the Baroness had been tried for the murder of her husband. Terrific was the shock which the young nobleman experienced at this intelligence: he became pale as death, and staggered against the wall for support. The astounding folly which he had committed struck him like a tremendous blow; and when he began to recover his self-possession, the direst alarms sprang up in his mind at the thought of having espoused such a woman.

But how was he to act? It was done—and could not be undone. He felt frightened at her; and he thought to himself that it was absolutely necessary he should veil his feelings and put upon the transaction the best face possible. A perfect adept in dissimulation, he had little difficulty in thus masking the emotions which had been so suddenly and terribly excited within him: and on returning into the vestry where he had left his bride, the radiant beauty of her person mitigated considerably the first feelings of horror and alarm which had seized upon him. The proper entries being made in the register, Lord Saxondale conducted forth his bride to the carriage; and they proceeded to the mansion in Park Lane. There they were received by the assembled domestics, who, as yet ignorant of the lady's antecedents, wore an expression of countenance indicative of tacit and respectful congratulation.

Several days passed; and in the meantime Lord Saxondale had read the whole particulars of Adelaide's trial in a file of English newspapers, to which he referred for the purpose. The account was precisely that which we have given in the preceding chapter; and a paragraph, subsequently published, contained the intelligence of the death of the Baroness de Charlemont's aunt, who expired a few days after that trial. And what was the impression which the perusal of this remarkable case made upon the young bridegroom's mind? Vainly did he endeavour to persuade himself that Adelaide was innocent: he could not succeed:—at the bottom of his soul rested the dark, the terrible conviction that she was really guilty, and that he had married a murderess! Yet again and again did he say to himself, "No, it is impossible: she is innocent!"—and again and again did he find himself yielding to quite the opposite conviction. But when in her presence—when under the influence of her sensuous witcheries and voluptuous blandishments—he at first fell into that reckless devil-me-care mood which seemed to say, "Well, never mind—it can't be helped—she won't poison *me!* She is a magnificent creature; and it was worth any sacrifice to possess her."

A fortnight passed; and not a single visit was paid at Saxondale House: it was quite evident that the fashionable world of the British metropolis intended to treat the new Lady Saxondale as she had been treated in France when presenting herself at the ball at the Odeon Theatre. But she said not a word upon the subject to her husband: she did not seem to be annoyed—she appeared as if she were unconscious that such studied and complete neglect was demonstrated towards her. The domestics of the household had gradually grown cool—some sullen and sulky—others half-inclined to show what they thought; and several gave warning to leave at the expiration of a certain term. When these notices were mentioned to Adelaide by the steward and the housekeeper, she made no remark beyond bidding them get other servants; and she asked no questions. It seemed quite sufficient for her that she had become Lady Saxondale, and she troubled not herself about any other circumstance.

Edmund was astonished that neither Lord Petersfield on the one hand, nor Marlow and Malton on the other, had taken the slightest notice of his marriage. They came not near him: neither did they write; and he carefully avoided the chance of falling in with them—for if he did, it would be impossible to help touching on the subject which he felt was no pleasant one whereof to attempt the justification. His mother too continued silent for the fortnight which thus elapsed from the day of his marriage. During this interval he had remained almost entirely at home, save when visiting his club for the purpose of consulting the file of newspapers. He had then noticed that those acquaintances whom he met there, bowed most distantly and coldly—some scarcely at all; and as day after day passed, and not a single carriage rolled up to the door of Saxondale House—not one double knock was heard—he could not shut his eyes to the fact that he and his wife were completely cut. This was by no means agreeable to a vain and conceited young man, whose ambition it was to make himself conspicuous in society. The reader will remember that one of his principal motives for going abroad was on account of the coldness demonstrated towards him by his acquaintances in London; and he had hoped that by accepting the post of *attaché* to an Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, he should acquire a certain importance which, on his return to England, would turn the coldness of his acquaintances into parasitical eagerness to court him. But this hope was now utterly destroyed; and he could not blind himself to the fact that he had committed the most egregious act of folly



which he could possibly have perpetrated. He possessed a wife of resplendent beauty, but of ruined character—of a character ruined, too, in the most dreadful sense of the word; and he would ten thousand times rather, after all, that she had been a wanton than that she should be branded by public opinion as a murderess.

And then, too, when the frenzy of passion was sated by revelling in her arms—when on each occasion his sensuous cravings were appeased—the horrid thought would creep into his mind that he was held in the embrace of a murderess. This kept him awake at nights; and in the profound silence of the dark hours, as she slept by his side, he would vainly endeavour to banish from his mind the appalling conviction that it was an assassin who slumbered *there!* The imagination, thus goaded, is fearfully fertile in conjuring up circumstances of terror; and Edmund thought to himself that the same hand which had poured the poison between the lips of one husband, might not hesitate to do the same to another, if some secret

purpose were to be answered thereby. And then that Count de St. Gerard too—Edmund liked not the name: it became one of the phantoms that haunted him—and he thought that if this individual should appear upon the scene and renew his acquaintance with Adelaide, she might dispose of her bridegroom to make way for the possession of a third husband in the person of him whom, in a court of justice, she confessed to have loved.

Thus was it that even within the first fortnight of this most inauspicious marriage, young Lord Saxondale was led bitterly to repent the step he had taken. But how was he to extricate himself from the meshes which he had allowed to be woven around his limbs? how was he to fling off the coil which an almost incredible infatuation had fastened upon him? He could not: he was afraid of that woman whom he had married—he shuddered and he trembled at the awful capacity for mischief which he believed to be possessed by his bride. And it was this very terror in which he stood of her that made him exercise all his powers to veil the real condition of his feelings,—so that he studied his best to multiply all possible assiduities and attentions towards her whom he had made Lady Saxondale. He was growing desperate;—and yet, an arrant coward in every possible respect, he dared not take any decisive step. He endeavoured to drown his thoughts in champagne, and also in the luxuriousness of Adelaide's charms: but there was gall mingled in the wine-cup—and when his passion was sated by sensuous enjoyment, he felt as if the splendid creature whom he held glowing and palpitating in his embrace, might all in a moment turn into a loathsome reptile and fasten its venomous fangs upon him.

A fortnight thus passed away; and at the expiration of this interval, Lord Saxondale found that his funds were exhausted and that he required money. As yet no conversation had taken place between himself and his bride as to her own pecuniary resources: but from the statement which he had read in the newspaper, he believed that these were of a limited nature. Still he thought it was as well to understand exactly the amount of the revenue which she did possess; and as he felt sure the house in Paris belonged to her, he thought that it might as well be disposed of, as they were by no means likely to need such an establishment in the French capital, inasmuch as Adelaide had vowed that she would never revisit that city again. He did not exactly know how to introduce the subject to his wife, of whom, as already stated, he stood much in terror: but one morning, while they were seated at breakfast, a remark which he made at once turned the discourse into the desired channel.

"I am going presently," he said, "upon a somewhat unpleasant business. It is necessary that I should call on old Petersfield, to obtain some money from him, as my own is exhausted and my regular allowance is not yet due."

"Ah! I am glad, Edmund," responded his wife, "that you have spoken upon the subject: for I myself am in need of money. I want new dresses, various articles of jewellery, and a thousand little things, which I must purchase at my leisure. By the bye, my dear," she went on to observe, "I have not as yet made you acquainted with the precise nature of my affairs: but it is requisite I should now do so. I am well aware," she added, with a peculiar look, in which for a moment there seemed to flash a glance of irony, "that you only married me for myself alone—because you were doubtless aware that my pecuniary means were not large; and by the circumstance of marriage they have disappeared altogether."

"Oh! of course," exclaimed Edmund, "I know that you lose your widow's pension by having married again: but that house in Paris must be worth something—eight or ten thousand pounds, I should think, at the very least;—and as my allowance was well enough for a single man, but will not go a great way to support us both in a proper manner, I was thinking that till I am of age and become the master of my fortune, it will be just as well if we were to dispose of that house, the furniture, and equipages. It could be done in a few weeks——"

"No doubt," answered his wife, with the most perfect suavity of tone and a complete ease of manner; "there would not be the slightest difficulty if the house belonged to me."

"Belonged to you!" echoed Saxondale. "I thought you told me it was your own?"

"To be sure!—and I told you truly," said Adelaide. "You do not, I hope, think that I would deceive you?" she demanded somewhat indignantly.

"Oh, no! not for a moment! But——"

"Perhaps I might have omitted to mention a little fact," continued Adelaide; "but if so, it was because all my thoughts and feelings were so completely absorbed by the love with which you inspired me. However, I must now inform you that by a provision of my late husband's will——"

Edmund could not help shuddering as he thought that this husband to whom she so calmly alluded, had been sent out of the world by her own criminal hand.

"The mansion in the Rue de Tournon," she continued, in the same placid voice and manner, "was to pass away from me, in case of contracting a second marriage, to a distant male relative of the late Baron. But of course this is a matter of perfect indifference to you,—as you will shortly be immensely rich; and in the interval your guardians must supply you with funds: or else there are plenty of means by which the heir to a noble property can raise as much money as he requires. You had better go and see Lord Petersfield, as you just now suggested."

"Yes—I think I had better," answered Saxondale.

Rising from the breakfast-table, he was about to leave the room, when his wife said, "Edmund, one word before you go."

He turned—and now perceived that her countenance wore a very peculiar expression, which made him afraid. It had for the moment a look so sinister, that deeply as he suspected her soul of conscious guilt, he was surprised and shocked to behold that expression upon a countenance so transcendently beautiful. It appeared to reflect dark and malignant passions: and yet he could scarcely explain more definitely to himself the meaning to be gathered from that look. It quickly passed away, leaving an angelic serenity behind it:—and beckoning him towards her, Adelaide rose from

her seat—placed her hand upon his shoulder—and thus leaning lightly upon him, gazed tenderly in his face, as she said, "Lord Petersfield will doubtless indulge in many bitter invectives against me: it is for you, as my husband, to defend me."

"Defend you!" stammered Saxondale, who was afraid of suffering his wife to know how well he was acquainted with all the particulars of her trial in Paris two years back.

"Yes, Edmund—defend and vindicate me!" she said emphatically: and now he felt her hand grasp his shoulder for a moment with a sudden spasmodic violence. "You must not think that I am ignorant of what is uppermost in your mind. I am well aware that you know all the past as it relates to me: and I thank you, my Edmund, for having with so much delicacy abstained from alluding to it. The charge was most odious—most foully false. You can conceive the pain and anguish it occasions me to be compelled thus to allude to it. Not for a moment must *you*, Edmund, believe that I was guilty! No—if the world has been unjust towards me, it is for you as my husband to make me the fullest amends by your kindness and your confidence. Go you, therefore, to Lord Petersfield—tell him that you are convinced of my entire innocence of the dreadful accusation levelled against me—and represent to him that if he be a man of justice and honour, of mercy and of humanity, he will adopt the same view. And now go."

Thus speaking, Adelaide threw her arms around her husband's neck—imprinted a long and sensuous kiss upon his lips—and sent him forth with ecstacy thrilling through his form, but with bewilderment in his brain. Was she indeed innocent? could it be possible? Ah! what would he not give to be enabled to believe her so! And again he tried—again he strove, to clutch that belief: but he could not!—a secret voice in the depths of his soul whispered that she was really guilty.

He proceeded on foot towards Lord Petersfield's residence: but while repairing thither, he deliberated whether he should have recourse to his guardian, or whether he should raise a loan from the money-lender who was recommended by Emily Archer, and who had before accommodated him. As we have already stated, he had hitherto sedulously avoided the chance of falling in with Lord Petersfield: but he did not like the silence which that nobleman, Marlow and Malton, and his mother had hitherto maintained in respect to his marriage. He could not help fearing that some mischief was brewing; and yet he knew not what. He was nervous and uneasy: his mind was filled with vague apprehensions of impending evil: he longed to see Petersfield for one reason, yet dreaded to meet him for another. While thus hesitating and deliberating, he arrived within sight of the house where his lordship dwelt. He looked at his watch to see whether it were yet too early to present himself there: but finding that it was eleven o'clock, he resolved to put as bold a face upon the matter as possible, and see his guardian. He accordingly knocked at the door: the summons was at once answered by a footman; and at the same instant Edmund caught sight of Lord Petersfield passing into a room at the extremity of the spacious hall.

"Oh, I see his lordship is at home," observed Edmund, assuming as off-hand and self-possessed a manner as possible: and he was about to cross the threshold.

"No, my lord—his lordship is *not* at home," responded the domestic, with marked emphasis.

"You lying scoundrel!" ejaculated Edmund, becoming crimson with mingled rage and mortification. "I saw your master enter the dining-room yonder."

"I don't care what you saw," responded the footman doggedly and even insolently. "I tell you he is *not* at home."

For an instant Edmund was inclined to turn away: but thinking that it would be quite safe to give vent to his ill-temper by bullying the lacquey, he exclaimed, "You impertinent scoundrel, how can you stand there, looking me in the face, and telling such an infernal falsehood?"

"Scoundrel!" echoed the man: "who do you call a scoundrel? At all events my wife is an honest woman—and not a murderess."

With these words he banged the door in the face of Lord Saxondale, who stood upon the steps livid and trembling with rage. So violent were his feelings that he could have screamed out—he could have dashed himself against the door—he could have torn it with his nails: but people were passing at the time, and he felt that he was already sufficiently mortified—nay, crushed and beaten down—to avoid farther exposure. He therefore hurried away; and flinging himself into the first hackney-coach that he perceived, he ordered himself to be driven to the office of Mr. Musters in the City. During the drive thither, Edmund's reflections were of the most painful nature. Already cut by the entire fashionable world—looked coldly upon, or scarcely spoken to, by his acquaintances—denied admittance into the house of his own guardian—and insulted by a lacquey,—the possessor of a splendid title, and with enormous revenues in the prospective, was at this instant the most wretched mortal upon the face of the earth. It was therefore in no very pleasant frame of mind that he was set down at the office of the money-lender: but again putting on the best possible face, he said to himself, as he ascended the dark dingy staircase, "At all events, old Musters won't care who I have married; and as he has been paid once, he will be ready enough to lend me money again."

In the front office a wretched starveling boy was writing at a desk; and in response to the young nobleman's question, he said that Mr. Musters was alone and disengaged. Edmund accordingly passed into the back-room which the money-lender made his private office, and where he was now seated at a desk covered with papers. He was a little old man, looking as if he had been completely shrivelled up, without being actually scorched, by the ordeal of some intense process of heat: his countenance had something vile and mean, as well as sharp and cunning, in its expression: he was dressed in a suit of rusty black—his linen was none of the cleanest—and by his personal appearance he rather resembled a decayed tradesman or broken-down undertaker, than a man who, if he chose, could write his name to a cheque for a hundred thousand pounds. Yet such was the case: for during a long series of years, Musters had been amassing wealth by every variety of usurious, dirty, and dishonest expedient,—taking

care, however, in all his proceedings, to avoid entangling himself with the criminal law. If his form appeared to have been shrivelled up in the close and heated atmosphere of a City-office, his soul was assuredly tanned, and parched, and indurated, so as to be perfectly inaccessible to every generous or proper feeling: it was hardened to all the amenities of life, and susceptible only of ideas connected with sordid gain.

"Well," cried Saxondale, adopting an air of flippant gaiety, which he was ever wont to mistake for well-bred ease, as he entered into the usurer's presence,—"I am come to see you again:" —and he flung himself upon a seat with an air of dissipated languor.

"What has procured me the honour of your lordship's visit?" inquired Musters: and it struck Edmund that his manner was cold and distant.

"I want you to write me a cheque for fifteen hundred, or so," he responded; "and you shall have my promissory note."

"Very sorry, my lord—but it can't be done," said the old man: and then he compressed his lips with decisive firmness over his toothless gums.

"How do you mean—can't be done?" ejaculated Edmund. "Didn't you but very lately trust me to the amount of four thousand pounds? and didn't Marlow and Malton settle with you?"

"Well, my lord, they settled after a fashion," replied Musters; "they made me strike off a considerable amount."

"Oh, all stuff and nonsense!" cried Edmund: "there was plenty of margin left for your profits, I'll be bound. And then, what's more, you got ready money instead of having to wait till I came of age."

"Yes—but Messrs. Marlow and Malton will not be disposed to settle your lordship's debts again," said the old man, now speaking almost doggedly.

"And if they don't, sha'n't I be of age in eighteen months? and you will of course calculate interest and commission, and all that sort of thing, accordingly. Come, I want fifteen hundred to-day very particular indeed; and I will give you a bill for a couple of thousand."

"I would rather decline, my lord," answered Musters firmly.

"But why? This is not treating me well. I know you have got plenty of money: so there's no excuse of that sort. Come now, there's a good fellow—take out your cheque-book:"—and Lord Saxondale condescended to adopt a coaxing and cajoling tone with the old usurer.

"Once for all, my lord, I cannot—I will not:" —and the money-lender, throwing himself back in his chair, assumed a look of sternest decision.

"But what's your reason?" demanded Saxondale, who scarcely thought that the money-lender, whom on former occasions, during his connexion with Emily Archer, he had found so pliant, could now prove completely inflexible: "what's the reason, I say? Am I not as well able to pay as I was some few months ago?"

"I don't know, my lord—I don't know," answered Musters mysteriously. "At all events, I decline accommodating your lordship."

"But I must and will know what is the reason," exclaimed Saxondale, really alarmed: and all the vague terrors which had been previously haunting him, came back with renewed force into his mind. 'There is something strange in your conduct, Musters. Money-lending is your vocation, where you know it is safe; and you can have no fear in respect to me. Come, why don't you speak? If you have got anything in your mind, I wish you would out with it at once."

"I would rather not give any explanations, my lord," was the usurer's curt response.

"Well, I suppose the fact of the matter is," cried Saxondale, nervous and agitated, and full of apprehensions, which were all the more torturing because so indefinite,—"there is something in this marriage of mine that you don't like?"—and it was with difficulty he could give utterance to the words, which appeared to stick in his throat.

"Since you press me so, my lord," answered Musters, "I must candidly confess that you have stated the exact truth."

"But what the deuce has my marriage got to do with the business I propose to you?" demanded Saxondale, in a vehement manner.

"Simply this, my lord," rejoined Musters: "that if your relations and friends should take it into their heads to lock you up in a lunatic-asylum for having contracted such a marriage, what would become of any money I might lend you?"

Edmund—the wretched Edmund—sank back aghast at this announcement which struck him with the force of a revelation. It appeared to be the solution of all the vague terrors which were floating in his mind: it was the key to the reading of the mystery of his own feelings: it seemed at once to point to the impending evil whereof he had a presentiment. He longed to ask old Musters a few questions—as to whether he had only spoken at random, or whether he had any real grounds for throwing out such a frightful eventuality?—but when he endeavoured to speak, the words stuck in his throat, and he could only gasp forth a few inarticulate sounds.

"You needn't frighten yourself, my lord," said Musters, fearing lest the young nobleman should go into a fit. "I don't know that such a thing *will* happen; and I have no particular reason for supposing that it may. But this I do know—that where persons have a great deal of property, either in possession or prospective, there are always people more or less interested in getting them locked up; and heaven knows you have done enough to induce any two physicians to pronounce you mad a dozen times over. However, it's no business of mine; and I should not have said so much, had you not pressed me. And now, my lord, as my time is precious," added old Musters, looking at his watch, "you will excuse me."

Saxondale rose from his seat—and without uttering a word, quitted the room. He felt as if he were walking in a dream—not merely a dream, but in the midst of a hideous night-mare. There was a stunning and stupifying sensation in his brain: he felt that his position was a dreadful one —but beyond this he had not the power to reflect deliberately upon it. Mechanically did he re-enter the hackney-coach; and three times did the driver ask whither he was to proceed, ere Saxondale gave him any answer. Then, in a mood of thorough desperation, he said, "To the office of Marlow and Malton, Parliament Street."

Why he gave this address he scarcely knew: but it seemed to him that he was in a state of horrible uncertainty which must be cleared up. He had better know the worst at once; and if any such shocking intention as that at which Musters had hinted, were entertained concerning him, he would rather be informed of it than continue in a frightful suspense. It did not occur to him that supposing such an aim was really in view, those who purposed it would keep their own counsel until the moment of its execution. In short, he had no power nor faculty for deliberate meditation; and from this half-stupified condition of mind he was scarcely aroused somewhat, when the hackney-coach stopped at the lawyers' office in Parliament Street.

Alighting from the vehicle, Lord Saxondale was seized with another fit of hesitation; and for a few moments he was almost inclined to depart again, without seeking an interview with Marlow and Malton. He would probably have done so, had he not suddenly recollected that his wife had asked him for money; and as he had none to give her, he felt afraid to return into her presence without being able to gratify her request. He therefore ascended the stairs; and entering the clerks' office, inquired if either of their employers was within? He was informed that Mr. Marlow was in his private room—but that he had two gentlemen with him: whereupon Edmund said he would wait. One of the clerks took in his name; and returned, saying, "Mr. Marlow is not particularly engaged, my lord: he has only got two friends with him; and he hopes your lordship will walk in without ceremony."

Edmund was suddenly cheered by this invitation: it looked as if the lawyer-guardian was inclined to be more civil than the diplomatic one;—and again assuming an off-hand manner, and mustering up all his courage, Lord Saxondale passed into the private office. There he found Marlow seated with two gentlemen, with whom Edmund was altogether unacquainted. One was an elderly man, with gray hair—dressed in deep black—and having a very serious look. The other was some years younger—handsome, and apparently good-humoured—gaily apparelled—and with a massive watch-chain festooning over a bright-hued waistcoat. Marlow introduced Lord Saxondale to these gentlemen—but did not mention their names in return. This however Edmund considered to be an oversight; and thinking nothing more of it, took a seat.

"Well, my lord," said Marlow, smiling archly, "so you have perpetrated matrimony—eh? I have not paid my respects at Saxondale House, because I thought I was not wanted."

"And why did you think that?" inquired Edmund, still more cheered than at first by the jovial kind of good-naturedly bantering tone which the solicitor adopted.

"Why do I think so?" ejaculated Marlow: "why, because you did not condescend to consult me as to the alliance—although you ought, you know, to have done so—strictly speaking—as I am your guardian. Neither did you send me a piece of the wedding-cake:"—and here he laughed again.

"Upon my word, there was no wedding-cake at all!" replied Edmund, laughing likewise. "You see, it was all done in such a hurry——"

"So I understand," interrupted Marlow. "Come, do tell us all about it: it will be so very amusing! These are friends of mine—very intimate friends—capital fellows too—and so you needn't mind speaking before them."

"Oh! not I," ejaculated Edmund, perfectly rejoiced at the manner in which his marriage was treated by the attorney, and making sure that his pecuniary demands would be unhesitatingly complied with. "Of course you have heard that Lady Saxondale—the *new* Lady Saxondale, I mean—is a very beautiful woman!"

"Oh! that is well known," responded Marlow. "I think you never saw her before you met her that night at the Odeon Theatre?"

"Never," replied Edmund.

"Ah! then see what an effect beauty has upon your lordship," cried Marlow, rubbing his hands quite gleefully. "Why, the next morning—— yes, I do believe from what Petersfield told me, the very next morning—you carried off the prize—wasn't it so? Really your lordship is a perfect killer of ladies' hearts. But tell us—was it not so?"

"Well, it was," answered Edmund. "But you see, she is so exceedingly beautiful—so fascinating——"

"To be sure—to be sure," observed Marlow. "And then you travelled straight off with her ladyship—brought the fair prize to London—and married her as quick as special license and parson's aid could tie the knot. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly so," rejoined Saxondale, who felt himself quite the hero of the scene, and fancied the exploit was altogether as great and glorious as Marlow was depicting it.

"Pray excuse me, my lord, for asking a question," said the elder of the two gentlemen, both of whom appeared much interested in the discourse: "but is not my friend Marlow exaggerating the facts? Was it really the case that at the very first meeting your heart was vanquished by the lady, and her's became enthralled to you? and that you bore off the prize with such wondrous celerity?"

"It is all true—perfectly true," responded Saxondale. "Marlow has exaggerated nothing."

"Well, it was a superb feat," remarked the younger of the two gentlemen; "and your lordship has really much to be proud of. I suppose that your lordship did not condescend to any such low and grovelling proceedings as to inquire into her ladyship's resources—family connexions—personal circumstances—or otherwise?"

"Oh, no—nothing of the sort!" replied Saxondale: "it was all love—sheer love."

"And did her ladyship run away with you, my lord—or you with her ladyship?" inquired the younger gentleman.

"Oh! I ran away with her," responded Saxondale, determined to monopolize all the honour and glory of the proceeding. "But I say, Marlow," he immediately added, turning to the lawyer, "what the deuce is the matter with old Petersfield? I called on him just now—and he was denied to me."

"Why, my lord," responded the attorney, "you can't be surprised if Lord Petersfield, with his exceedingly precise and rigid notions of etiquette, should be somewhat vexed,—in the first place that

you did not consult him—and in the second place ——but I am fearful of giving offence——however, as of course your lordship must have the best possible reasons for knowing the accusation to have been false——"

"Oh, yes—her ladyship assures me that it was," interrupted Saxondale: "quite false! By the bye, she is very badly treated by the world; and it is my duty, as her husband, to defend and vindicate her."

As he uttered these words, Edmund drew himself up with as much dignity as he could possibly assume: for he was quite proud of the quotation from his wife's own injunctions, and which he thought peculiarly happy and well turned.

"No doubt of it," said the younger of the two gentlemen: "no doubt of it! Of course your lordship was acquainted with all the circumstances before the marriage took place?"

"Not a bit of it!" ejaculated Edmund. "During the journey I overheard several things that sounded uncommon strange; and I meant to ask her ladyship for an explanation: but such was her beauty, and so great her fascinations, that all other things were put out of my head——"

"Oh, of course!" interrupted Marlow: "so that if the Baroness de Charlemont had been a fiend in angel-shape, and you had been somewhat led to suspect it, you would not have troubled yourself to sift the matter to the very bottom?"

"Not I indeed!" observed Edmund flippantly; and he thought that this way of treating the affair was all very fine and manly—while Marlow's behaviour towards him put him into the best possible spirits.

"Well, for my part," said the younger of the two gentlemen, "I never knew a love affair so expeditiously conducted. Your lordship can say with Cæsar—'*I came, I saw, I conquered?*'"

"Capital!" exclaimed Saxondale, affecting to laugh heartily. "But, by the bye, my time is somewhat precious—a newly-married man, you know, must not neglect his bride—and so I must be off. Can I say a few words with you, Mr. Marlow, in private?"

"Oh! I can understand very well what it is," cried the lawyer, laughing: "the old song, my lord—eh? Money, I suppose?"

"Precisely so: and under all circumstances I hope you will write me a handsome cheque."

"I will send it up presently, my lord. Mr. Malton has just stepped out; and he has locked up the cheque-book. Let me see," he continued, looking at his watch: "it is now half-past one o'clock. At three, my lord, one of my clerks shall wait upon your lordship at Saxondale House with a cheque."

"I shall be at home at the time: but don't make it later, because I want to take her ladyship out for a little shopping."

"Not a moment later," responded Marlow: "my clerk shall be at Saxondale House at three o'clock punctually."

Edmund thereupon took his leave of the solicitor and the two gentlemen; and in a very different frame of mind was he borne away in the hackney-coach from the office, than that in which he had first alighted there. On returning home, he said nothing to his wife of the rebuff he had experienced at Lord Petersfield's—nor of his fruitless visit to the money-lender: all he deemed it necessary to say, was that he had seen one of his guardians, who was most kind and civil, and who would send him up a cheque for a considerable sum at three o'clock. The bride was evidently much pleased with this intelligence; and the carriage was ordered to be in readiness at half-past three to take Lord and Lady Saxondale out on their shopping expedition.

Punctually at three o'clock a hackney-coach drew up to the door of Saxondale House; and one of the lawyers' clerks, whom Edmund knew by sight, was shown up to the drawing-room where he was seated.

"Please your lordship," said the clerk, "Mr. Marlow has brought the cheque: but he wishes to say something to your lordship—he is in a very great hurry—is sorry to take such a liberty with your lordship—but if you would step down and speak to him in the coach, he would esteem it a most particular favour."

"Oh, no liberty—not a bit of it!" ejaculated Edmund, rejoiced at the idea of receiving the cash that he wanted: and he sped down the stairs three or four at a time.

Just pausing in the hall to take his hat, Saxondale hurried out of the house; and approaching the hackney-coach, looked in. The glance which he thus flung inside, showed him to his astonishment that Mr. Marlow was not there—but that two queerly-dressed men, with no very prepossessing countenances, occupied the vehicle. Edmund was about to turn round and inquire of the clerk what all this meant—when he was suddenly seized upon from behind, and tossed completely into the hackney-coach,—the two men receiving him in their grasp with more firmness than courtesy. A third individual—the one who had just pushed him in, and who was of an appearance similar to the two already seated inside—sprang in after him: the door was banged by Marlow's clerk—the wooden blinds were instantly put up by those inside—and the hackney-coach drove rapidly away.

CHAPTER CXXVIII.

CHIFFIN AT LIVERPOOL.

WE must now go back somewhat, for a few minutes, to a former point in our narrative, in order to give certain necessary explanations. The reader will recollect under what circumstances Chiffin the Cannibal left the boozing-ken in Bethnal Green. He had arrived there with wet garments after his swim in the canal at Agar Town—he found that he had been robbed of his hoarded money by Tony Wilkins—he borrowed a suit of decent raiment from the landlord—and then he sped away in pursuit. But speedily struck by a sense of the imprudence of his conduct, he hied back to the neighbourhood of the boozing-ken; and on perceiving a policeman standing at the door, beat a precipitate retreat.

The explanations we have to give are these:—Chiffin had been seen and recognised by a person in the street when he was first entering the boozing-ken in his wet garments; and this person, knowing that a reward was offered for his appre-

hension on account of his murderons attack on Madge Somers, resolved to capture him. But not daring to make the attempt alone, and knowing from the general character of the boozing-ken that he was unlikely to receive any assistance there, he sped off to the nearest station-house. He shortly returned with three or four police-officers; and a rigorous search of the premises was instituted: but in the meanwhile Chiffin had fled in the borrowed suit of the landlord's—and therefore the search was vain. The policeman who was posted in front of the public-house, did not observe Chiffin when he peeped round the corner: and thus no pursuit took place. He got clear off, as the reader is aware; and after some adventures, betook himself to Saxondale Castle. But inasmuch as he had not merely been traced to that boozing-ken, but his cast-off garments were likewise discovered there, the landlord was compelled to give some account of his own share of the proceeding, to avoid being prosecuted for harbouring a man charged with felony. He therefore boldly declared that though Chiffin had occasionally frequented his house, he did not know who he was—and had not the least idea that he was wanted by the officers of justice. On being farther questioned, he gave an accurate description of the suit of clothes which he had lent him,—thus endeavouring to display the utmost zeal in affording the constables as much information as he could, in order to exonerate himself. The consequence was that an advertisement was drawn up, containing a description of Chiffin, together with the suit of clothes borrowed from the landlord: and this was inserted every day for a week in the newspapers,—after which time it was only published occasionally. These necessary explanations being given, the reader will better understand the incidents which are to follow.

On making his exit from Edenbridge Park—after his adventure with the Marquis of Eagledean and Elizabeth Paton—Chiffin the Cannibal pursued his way as long as it was dark; and when morning dawned, he stopped at a lonely cottage—where, on proving that he had the means to pay, he was accommodated with what he wanted. As a matter of course he had kept his word in not seeking an interview with Lord Harold Staunton; because it was his interest to adhere strictly to the terms dictated by the Marquis.

At that cottage he remained the entire day,—telling some plausible story to avert any suspicion which might attach itself to such conduct on his part. When night came, he set out again—pursuing his journey on foot until morning, when he again rested at some isolated hut,—resuming not his travels till the re-appearance of night. In this manner did he journey, taking care to avoid the metropolis, and crossing the Thames at Kingston. His way was then continued northward; and at the expiration of a week he reached Liverpool.

There he took up his quarters at a low pot-house in one of the obscurest neighbourhoods of that immense town; and cautiously instituting inquiries with respect to the sailing of vessels for America, he found that he should still have to wait four or five days before he could embark. He however felt tolerably confident of being enabled to remain in snug security at the public-house; and as he had plenty of ready money in his pocket, he possessed the means of whiling away the time with as much liquor and tobacco as were requisite for such a purpose. But he had not been four-and-twenty hours at this place, when he was horribly alarmed by reading in the London *Times* one of those advertisements to which we have alluded, and which were still repeated at intervals. It gave such a life-like portraiture of the man and such an accurate description of the costume which he then wore, that he felt his security would be terribly menaced if the same advertisement met the eyes of the people of the house, or any of its frequenters. He therefore hastened to pay his bill and take himself off. He however resolved to remain in Liverpool, as it was more than ever necessary that he should escape to the United States, now that he had received such a startling proof of the measures which were being adopted in London to capture him. The first necessary proceeding to avert suspicion from himself, was to obtain another suit of apparel with the least possible delay; and then he hoped that in a costume quite different from the one specified in the advertisement, and by shifting his quarters every night, as well as by keeping himself particularly close during the day, he might ensure his safety till the vessel should sail.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening when he quitted the low public-house after seeing the advertisement in the manner just described; and recollecting that at no great distance there was an old clothes' shop, he bent his steps thither. After a very brief inspection of the garments displayed for sale, he made choice of a coarse suit fitted for one in the labouring walks of life; and perceiving an old white hat with a rusty crape band round it, he resolved to purchase that likewise. The bargain was made—he paid the money—took the suit—and went away with it. That night he passed at a public-house in another quarter of the town; and when he arose in the morning, dressed himself in the garb bought on the previous evening. Chiffin now looked something like himself again: that is to say, he was apparelled much in his wonted style before he had put on the borrowed suit belonging to the Bethnal Green landlord. It was a matter of calculation with the Cannibal to have thus assimilated his present raiment to that which he habitually wore. In the first place, it was so totally unlike that which was advertised in the newspaper: and in the second place, if he were seen at Liverpool by any one who knew him in London, the individual so recognising him would fancy it to be a mistake, and would argue that it was far from probable that Chiffin would dress himself in his old habitual style. Throughout that day he remained at the public-house where he had slept: but in the evening, in pursuance of his settled plan, he took his departure and proceeded to another in a distant quarter of the town. Had he still more particularly consulted his own safety, he would at once have retired to the chamber which he secured for the night's accommodation: but he could not resist the temptation of passing into the tap-room and sitting down to drink and smoke with whomsoever he might find there. He considered himself to be quite safe. It was one of the lowest description of public-houses,—situated in a very narrow alley, not above eight feet wide; and the old

tumble-down buildings hung so much over on either side, that the interval between the gabled roofs facing each other was even less than that between the thresholds of the front-doors. The boozing-ken was frequented by characters whose looks repelled the idea that they were very nice in their morals: the tap-room was filled with a dense cloud of tobacco-smoke; and the half-dozen men whom the Cannibal found seated there, were beheld dimly as if through a mist.

Chiffin sat down—called for some liquor and a pipe—and ensconcing himself in the obscurest corner, was half buried, as it were, in the shade of that nook and in the volume of smoke to which his own pipe now contributed. He did not immediately join in the conversation which was going on: for those who were discoursing were all friends with each other—and their topic was some matter interesting only to themselves. But presently there was a brief pause, during which more liquor was called for.

"By the bye," said one of the men, "what was that you was a-telling me, Bill, this morning, about some advertisement in a newspaper, and two hundred pound reward?"

"Why, about that feller—Chiffin, I think his name is," responded the individual thus addressed by the diminutive of Bill,—"him, you know, as murdered the publican and his wife in some place in London."

"And so there's two hundred pound reward, is there?" said another of the company. "My eye! shouldn't I like to get hold of it! It would just make me all right. But where do they think he is?"

"Ah! I dare say they would be uncommon glad to know," answered Bill: "but as they *don't* know, they keep on putting this advertisement into the paper. And talking of that there business, puts me in mind of what happened in this werry identical public, about five year ago. You recollect, Tom—don't yer?"

"Yes—I know what you mean," answered the person thus addressed, and who had the appearance of a costermonger. "I was sitting in this werry place, and was smoking a pipe and drinking a pint of half-and-half, just as I be now——"

"Well, but what are you talking about?" asked another of the company. "I don't know nothing of the business: but then I didn't use this house at that time."

"Well, but you lived in the neighbourhood, Dick," was the answer: "and you surely must remember how Jack the Rattler made his escape when the traps was arter him."

"I can't say I mind it," rejoined the former querist. "What was it all about?"

"Why, I will tell you. Me and some others was a-taking our pipe and pint in this room, when in walks a chap just as that genelman did just now:"—and here the man made a sort of flourish of his pipe in the direction of Chiffin, who began to feel excessively uneasy at his position, although he saw as yet he was not suspected. "Well, so he sits his-self down, calls for some brandy-and-water and a pipe, and begins to enjoy his-self. I couldn't help looking at him raythor hard—for thinks I to myself, 'There is something wrong about you, old feller;'—and yet I don't know why I should have thought so any more than I should about that ere genelman which is seated in the corner:"—and here there was another movement of the pipe in somewhat unpleasing indication of Mr. Chiffin.

"I suppose he had a precious queer face of his own," observed one of the listeners.

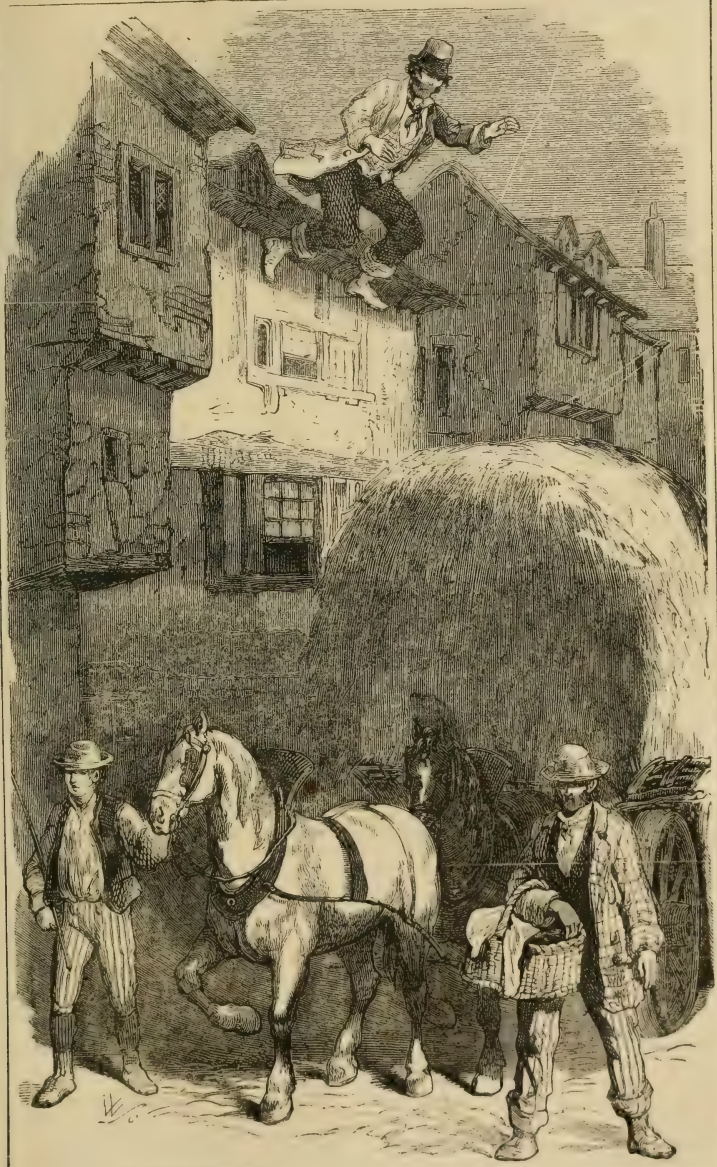
"No—it wasn't that: 'cos why, I doesn't judge by faces. If so be I did, I shouldn't perhaps think over well of two or three on us here; and I don't know that any of us is uncommon great beauties. Howsomever, the chap I am speaking of was smoking his pipe and drinking his brandy-and-water, when in walks two of the Liverpool police in plain clothes. I twigs them at once, and begins to ask myself a question or two, whether *I* could possibly be wanted?—but I wasn't kept long in any doubt: for the officers on looking round, sees the stranger-cove, goes straight up to him, and says, 'You are our prisoner.'—This was none other than Jack the Rattler. So up he jumps as quick as lightning: down falls one officer on this side—t'other on that side—I never see the thing so clean done in my life!—and in the twinkling of an eye Jack was out of the tap-room door. But there was such a crowd in front of the bar, and an alarm already raised, that his way was stopped: so what does he do, but rushes bang up the stairs—and by this time the two officers had picked their-selves up and was arter him. Well, it seems he had slept in the house the night before, and he had observed that there was a trap opening from the top of a ladder on to the roof. So up this ladder he springs like winky—gets on the tiles—and somehow or another makes clean off."

"But how?" asked one of the listeners. "He didn't jump down into the street, I suppose: or else he'd have spared Jack Ketch a job."

"No—he didn't do that; and it was never known what he did do: but it's supposed he got in at some attic window of another house, and escaped that way. Howsomever, he did get clean off—and that's certain. Ah, poor feller! he got took at Manchester a few weeks afterwards, and was hung at Lancaster."

A pause followed this narrative; and somehow or another Chiffin began to fancy that all eyes were gradually concentrating their looks upon himself. This might have been mere imagination: nevertheless it augmented the uneasiness which he had already experienced; and he inwardly cursed his folly in entering that tap-room. He could endure it no longer, and resolved to take his departure thence and establish his quarters at some other house, where he would observe a more prudential conduct. But he was too cautious to beat a retreat with a precipitation that might engender suspicion if it were not already aroused, and confirm it if it were. So he knocked the ashes out of his pipe in a leisurely manner—poured the rest of his liquor down his throat—and then rising, said, "Good night, gentlemen;" and approached the door. He almost fancied that two or three looked as if they meant to spring upon him: but nothing of the sort occurred—and he issued from the room without molestation.

But scarcely had he thus crossed the threshold and closed the door behind him, when by the light of the gas blazing in the bar, he beheld himself confronted by two men whom at a glance he saw to be officers. There was a little space between the



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tap-room door and the entrance to the bar—a sort of passage, whence the stairs likewise led up to the floors above. For an instant Chiffin hesitated what to do; for that first glance made him think that he was not recognised: but the next moment he saw that he *was*—and then, as the incident which had just been related in the tap-room flashed to his mind, he with one bound made for the stairs. The officers were after him in a moment: but Chiffin felt as if he were animated with the speed of the hunted deer. Scarcely a dozen seconds could have elapsed ere he reached the foot of that very ladder which had been mentioned in the tale he had heard. The officers, being outstripped, were left the distance of one flight of stairs behind him. The bright moonbeams were pouring in at the back window, and every feature of the place was thus clearly revealed to the view of the Cannibal. Up the ladder he sprang: the summit was closed by a trap-door fastened with a padlock—but with one tremendous thrust he burst it open; and disappeared from the view of the officers, just as they themselves reached the top of the staircase and set foot on the landing where the ladder stood.

Chiffin was now upon the slanting roof of the house. It has already been said that the moon was shining brightly; yet there were a few dark clouds floating above, and which gave a wild appearance to the evening. Quick as thought did the Cannibal's eyes sweep their glances all around, to discover what next was to be done, and find the means of ensuring his escape. The roof slanted down to a little low parapet overlooking the narrow alley, on the opposite side of which a similar parapet skirted the roofs of that line of houses. He measured the distance with his eye. The interval from parapet to parapet was a good seven feet; and there was the chance—nay, more, the hideous probability—of falling into the abyss, and being fearfully mutilated if not killed on the pavement below. But Chiffin's position was desperate. As well to die this way as to perish on the gallows! —and while he was yet hesitating, the constables were making their way through the open trap-door.

One tremendous bound—and the interval was cleared! Ejaculations of horror burst from the lips of the two officers at the moment that the Cannibal sprang forward: but even while those sounds were yet vibrating in the air, his foot had reached the opposite parapet—the gulf was between him and them—and they did not choose to follow him by the same daring and desperate aerial pathway. For a few moments they stood transfixed with amazement, and with a cold horror still upon them. They beheld him scramble rapidly up the sloping roof of the opposite house: he disappeared over the pointed summit of the gable; —and then they began to descend the ladder with the utmost speed.

Chiffin, on thus climbing over the roof of the house on which he had landed, found that its frontage looked upon a street considerably wider than the alley which he had so desperately cleared. But how was he to escape? There was an attic near: he advanced towards it—a light was burning inside—he peeped through the window: two working men were undressing themselves in preparation for their night's rest. The Cannibal feared to penetrate thither. Retracing his way along the roof of the house,—his feet being protected from sliding down by a parapet similar to those overlooking the alley,—he hastily approached another attic: but the instant that he looked in—for a light was burning there also—the most terrific cries of "Thieves! robbers! murderers!" were raised by the voices of two females: and he was compelled to beat a retreat.

But now his position was most critical: an attic on the opposite side of the street was opened—a pistol was fired—and the bullet struck the tilings close to where he stood. What was he to do? The whole neighbourhood would now be alarmed: for the man who had fired the pistol, likewise began to shout forth "Thieves! robbers! police!"

Chiffin cast one desperate look over the parapet. At that very instant an immense waggon was passing, with a colossal load of hay piled up so high as to be on a level with the tops of the first-floor windows of the houses in that street. One more bold leap, and he might yet be saved! Quick as the eye can wink he sprang from the parapet and alighted safely upon the hay. The unsuspecting waggoner, marching at the head of his team, little thought what additional load had suddenly fallen upon the burden which the waggon already bore; and a labouring-man, who was passing along on his way home with a basket on his arm, was looking around to discover the cause of those shouts and cries which met his ears.

A thick rope had been thrown over the load of hay to steady it; and without an instant's loss of time, the Cannibal slid down that rope at the back part of the waggon, and rushed along the street at the top of his speed. He plunged into a narrow alley diverging thence: it was quickly threaded—it brought him into another street—and thence another alley led into a maze of lanes, and courts, and dark thoroughfares, in the midst of which Chiffin relaxed his speed to a walk,—thus proceeding more leisurely in order to avoid attracting notice: and he felt that he was safe!

CHAPTER CXXIX.

ADELAIDE.

We must now return to Saxondale House, in Park Lane, London. Adelaide was in her own chamber, dressing for the purpose of accompanying her husband in the carriage, when he was so unceremoniously thrust into the hackney-coach and borne away. The extraordinary proceeding was witnessed by the hall-porter, a footman, and a page, who were standing at the front-door at the time. It will be remembered that a clerk from Marlow and Malton's office had thus enticed Lord Saxondale into the snare, and had closed the door of the vehicle the instant that the young nobleman was safe and secure inside: then, as the coach drove away, the clerk stood for a few moments, watching it till it turned into the next street and disappeared from his view.

"I say," exclaimed the footman, running down the steps, closely followed by the page and hall-porter, "what is the meaning of this?"

"What's the meaning?" echoed the clerk: "why, if you don't think that your young master

is as mad as a March hare, there are others in the world who do: and so, you see, they are going to have him taken care of at Dr. Burdett's asylum."

"Mad!" ejaculated the domestics, exchanging rapid glances with each other.

"Yes—mad to be sure," answered the clerk. "Do you think any one in his sound senses would carry on such games as he has been playing? This marriage of his is quite enough to convince any sensible people that he must be a stark staring lunatic—or else a perfect idiot, and improper to be left at large. I will tell you such a game! It was resolved to lock him up; and Marlow sent for two eminent lunacy-doctors to get them to see his lordship and report upon his state of mind. Well, Marlow was talking over the business with the two doctors in his private office just now, when who should make his appearance in the very nick of time, but Lord Saxondale himself? So, of course Marlow had him in; and it was fortunate it happened as it did, because it saved the doctors the trouble of coming here on some pretence to call upon his lordship. Marlow dexterously led him into conversation on those points which prove his madness; and his lordship talked in such a way that the doctors had not the slightest hesitation in signing a certificate that he was of unsound mind, and that it was dangerous for his own interests to leave him at large."

"But I don't think," observed the footman, "that you can call a young man mad just because he makes a foolish marriage. For my part, I care nothing about it, as I had already given notice to leave: but——"

"Oh, none of your *buts!*" interrupted the clerk: "it's all right—Lord Petersfield knows what he is about—and so do Marlow and Malton. Besides, there's another person who has given consent; and I shouldn't wonder if you saw that *other person* here presently, to put certain matters to rights:" —and the clerk looked significantly up at the house windows.

"Who do you mean?" demanded the hall-porter.

"Never mind who I mean. I daresay you will see all about it before the day is out—or I am very much mistaken:"—and with these words the clerk, bestowing a nod half-patronizing, half-significant upon the domestics, walked off.

The page hastened to communicate to one of the maids all that had happened, and everything he had thus overheard. The maid in her turn lost no time in acquainting one of her mistress's principal dependants with the facts; and thus by the time Adelaide descended to the drawing-room, in the expectation of going out shopping with her husband, she received the astounding intelligence of what had taken place. Ordering her maids to retire, she threw off her bonnet and shawl, and sat down in no very enviable state of mind to reflect upon her position. But scarcely had she begun to meditate,—and a very painful meditation it was upon which she was thus entering, —when a page came in to announce that a foreign gentleman, who said that it was unnecessary to give any name, requested to see her ladyship.

Adelaide knew full well who the visitor was; and wild feelings of mingled hope and suspense, thrilling joy and poignant apprehension, instantaneously sprang up within her: but her countenance betrayed not the emotions that were thus excited in her soul. She bade the page introduce the gentleman: but the moment the door closed behind the youth, Adelaide pressed her hand to her brow to steady her thoughts;—and then, as an expression of anguish swept over her features, she murmured to herself, "What am I to do if he should reject me?"

But as the door opened again, she composed her looks; and rising from the sofa, awaited with apparent calmness the presence of him who was about to enter.

The visitor was a Frenchman, and of exceedingly handsome appearance. His age was about six-and-twenty: he was not tall, but his figure was modelled to the most admirable proportions. He had dark hair and eyes; and a glossy black moustache gave additional effect to the brilliancy of his teeth. He was well dressed — genteelly, but without pretension; and his countenance as he entered the room, indicated a certain degree of mournfulness, blended however with a look expressing severity of purpose. He bowed somewhat coldly and distantly to Adelaide: and then glancing to the door, as if to convince himself that it was closed and that the page had retired, he said, "I am here, madam, in obedience to your urgent summons. May I request that the explanation of your object will be promptly and briefly given?"

"And is it thus that we meet?" asked Adelaide, in a reproachful tone, while her countenance assumed an expression of tender upbraiding, not unmingled with the evidences of inward agitation: "is it thus that you accost me after such a long, long separation?"

"Ah! madam, circumstances have sadly altered since last we beheld each other," responded the Frenchman, with bitterness in his accents.

"Altered?" repeated Adelaide: "yes, they have altered! But have you not received from me the written assurance that my love is still the same? —and if it be not to address me in similarly fond terms, wherefore are you here now?"

She motioned to a chair as she spoke; and while the Frenchman took it, she resumed her own seat on the sofa.

"You ask me why I am here, madam," he said, still cold and reserved, and still with an inflexible severity impressed upon his handsome countenance: "I will tell you. It is because I perceive by your letter that you would never rest satisfied —that you never would abandon a certain hope to which you cling—until you had received from me the positive and deliberately uttered assurance——"

"Stop, Henri!" ejaculated Adelaide: "give not utterance to words that will stamp my unhappiness, until you have heard *me* speak!"

"Proceed, madam. I will listen."

"Let us go back, Henri, to other times. Do you remember how much we loved each other?—have you forgotten that when I was first introduced into the brilliant society of Paris, and was surrounded by suitors, my heart's affections were bestowed upon you?—have you forgotten that when a law-suit dispossessed you of your patrimony and reduced you to comparative poverty, I of my own accord offered to fly with you—I proposed to link my fate with your's, and to accept

your destiny as my own, even though dire penury should be our lot!"

"I have forgotten nothing of all this, Adelaide," answered the Count de St. Gerard, his voice and his looks now indicating some degree of emotion, despite his endeavours to suppress and conceal it.

"Ah! you are touched, Henri—I see that you are!" she exclaimed: "and how could it be otherwise? It is impossible for you to retrospect upon the past and not feel at least some sympathy towards me, even if you no longer love me. Ah! was it nothing that I voluntarily offered to resign all chances of acquiring for myself a brilliant position?—was it nothing that I proposed to flee away from the numerous titled and wealthy suitors who were kneeling at my feet, to join my fate with your's?"

"No doubt, Adelaide," responded the Count, in a low deep voice, "the sacrifices you would have made, were great—and it was the best proof of *my* love that I would not permit you to accomplish them. No," he added bitterly, "poverty was enough for *one*: I could not have tolerated it when *two* were to share it! I could not have borne up against my misfortunes, if you whom I loved so fondly, must have had to encounter them likewise!"

"Your memory, then, has lost nothing of all which took place at that time," resumed Adelaide; "and perhaps you can conjure up with as much vividness as I now depict it to myself, that scene which took place between us when you resolved to leave Paris after the hostile decision of the tribunal was pronounced against you. You cannot have forgotten how you knelt at my feet—how you besought me to consent to that departure of your's—how you declared that it was better for us thus to separate! Did you not then assure me that though you must renounce the hope of ever calling me your wife,—nevertheless, so long as your existence lasted, you never could cease to love me? And then, too, in those parting moments of a dire anguish mutually experienced—mutually avowed—did I not as solemnly swear unto you that whatsoever my destiny would be—that whatsoever alliance the worldly-minded selfishness of my aunt might force me to accept—your image, and your image only, would be ever uppermost in my heart—that to you alone was my love given—and that never could I love another! Henri, have you forgotten all this? No—I feel assured that you have not!"

"No, Adelaide: and I am willing to admit," he answered,—"yes, even now in the face of all circumstances which have since occurred, that I look back to that scene with feelings of ineffable tenderness. And I will tell you more. When you espoused——the Baron de Charlemont," he added, as if with shuddering hesitation to pronounce the name, "I ventured to cherish the wildest—the fondest hope. I thought to myself that in the common course of nature, he could not live many years; and that he would leave you rich. I likewise thought that during those few years, I might create for myself a fortune instead of the one which I had lost; and that it was written in the book of destiny that happiness might yet smile upon you and me! Oh, it was that dream—it was that hope which nerved me with energy to carve out for myself a new career. I repaired to Strasbourg—I embarked in commerce, by the assistance of a few good friends—and my first ventures were all crowned with success. For upwards of two years was your image constantly in my mind. I thought of you without ceasing: the music of your voice ever appeared to be flowing upon my ears—my hand seemed to thrill with the last pressure which your's bestowed ere we bade farewell in Paris. But why should I dwell on all this?" he demanded passionately. "I built up for myself a fabric of hope: and, alas! I have seen it ruined. O Adelaide, you knew not the purity—the holiness of that love with which I regarded you!—and it was because I would do naught to desecrate what I believed to be the purity and holiness of *your* mind, that I never came near you—I never visited Paris—I never even ventured to send you a written line nor a verbal message, during the period of your wedded state. No: I felt that for the present you belonged to another—that an honourable man possessed you as his wife—and that I should deserve your contempt and scorn, as well as I should be sure to sink in my own estimation, if I ventured to remind you of our past love."

"And wherefore said you, Henri," asked Adelaide, trembling visibly however, as she approached a topic which she knew *must* be touched upon—and as she put a question to which she could but too well anticipate the response: "and wherefore, Henri, did you say that the fabric of hope which you built up was so cruelly destroyed?"

"Adelaide," responded the Count de St. Gerard, fixing upon her a look of mingled severity, reproachfulness, and commiseration, as if it were the countenance of her guardian angel that thus wore that expression,—"would you have me believe that you were innocent of the dreadful deed laid to your charge? Oh! do not add falsehood to your other guilt! do not let that fair face of your's assume a bold hardihood and a brazen effrontery! No—do not! I ask you not to confess to me: but I beseech you not to proffer a bold denial in my presence. From the very first moment that I read that frightful—that tragic occurrence in the public journals, there was a voice within me which said, 'She is guilty.'—Yes, I knew it: I felt convinced of it: or I should have hastened to condole with you. As a matter of duty I forwarded you the affidavits to the effect that we had never met nor corresponded since your marriage: for the truth was contained therein—and you had a right to the benefit of everything that told on your behalf. Nor will I deny, Adelaide, that the interval which elapsed between your arrest and your trial, was to me fraught with the most poignant anguish: for I had loved you too well not to feel deeply—aye, fearfully on your account. It is also true that when I read the result of the trial, I fell upon my knees and poured forth my thanks to Providence that you had been spared the dreadful doom which would have awaited you had the verdict been otherwise. Yes—I knew you to be guilty; and yet those were my feelings on your behalf!"

The Count de St. Gerard became deeply affected as he gave utterance to these words; and drawing forth his kerchief, he for nearly a minute buried his face therein. Adelaide rose gently and noise-

lessly from the sofa—approached him—laid her hand upon his shoulder—and bending down, whispered in his ear, "Henri, if you were stained with ten thousand crimes I should love you still——aye, and all the more tenderly too, because I should have the conviction that those crimes had been committed on my account!"

"Adelaide—wretched woman!" ejaculated the Count, starting up to his feet, and gazing upon her with a kind of wild horror in his countenance: "this is equivalent to a confession which you have made! But for heaven's sake say not that you committed that crime on my account!"

"For whom, then, should I have committed it?" demanded Adelaide vehemently: "what other motive had I for perpetrating it? Yes, Henri—it is true—I will no longer attempt to deny it——I am a murderess——I poisoned my husband—I killed him ruthlessly! But as God is my judge, it was for you that I did it——for you, Henri, have I sold my soul to Satan——have mercy upon me! My God, have mercy upon me!"

Clasping her hands wildly, the unhappy woman fell at his feet. Oh, what a spectacle was that—— the despair, the anguish, the entreaty, the love of that beautiful creature who had become a murderess on his account! He felt that it was terrible, and yet fraught with a deep romantic interest,—an interest that was fearful, a romance that was horrible—and yet replete with all the pathos which so frequently mingles with the darkest of tragedies. He gazed down upon her: the masses of her golden hair floated over her neck and shoulders: her two fair hands, firmly clasped, were extended up towards him. He could not behold her countenance —it was bent down—some of her bright tresses had fallen over it: but his eye could trace all the exquisite proportions of her shape—could behold the bosom, white as ivory, that was palpitating violently!

"Rise, Adelaide—rise," he said, catching her by the wrist: "this must not be. It is not to me that you must kneel: you have almost made me an accomplice in your crime by declaring that you committed it on my account. And yet, alas! I all along knew that it was so: I conjectured—I divined it! Rise, Adelaide, I say—and when you kneel again, let it be only to your Maker!"

He forced her to quit her suppliant posture; and she threw herself upon the sofa, sobbing and weeping bitterly. She who for some years past, had studied to exercise such a firm control over the outward expression of her feelings, that by this mere fact alone she had become a perfect mistress in the art of dissimulation,—she, that strong-minded being, was now unable to veil one single tittle of what she felt: she was all the melting, and tender, and weak woman once again.

"Adelaide," said the Count de St. Gerard, standing before her and speaking in a tone of solemn adjuration, "I entreat you to compose yourself—I implore you to embrace the conviction that it is useless to give way to whatsoever emotions are agitating and convulsing you thus! Tell me—wherefore have you sent for me to London? wherefore did you write and entreat me to undertake this journey from Strasbourg to meet you here? Are you not a wife again? have you not married an English nobleman of rank and wealth? and whatsoever my feelings may still be towards you, must I not respect the sanctity of this second alliance of your's, even as I respected the first?"

"Listen to me, Henri," exclaimed Adelaide, suddenly wiping away the tears from her eyes, and raising her flushed and agitated countenance: "hear me, I conjure you! After my husband's death I waited patiently for some months, saying to myself, 'He will allow a decent period to elapse, and then he will come.'—Such was my hope: but, as the time passed away and you came not, that hope grew fainter within me. Still I yielded not to despair; and I said to myself, 'A little while longer, and he will come.'—Every time the door opened, I expected to behold you: every time a letter was brought to me, my heart fluttered with the fond expectation that it was from you. But no: you came not—neither did you write. Thus did time pass on, till at length I could no longer shut my eyes to the conviction that you must believe me guilty—that you must regard me with loathing and abhorrence. And then, in the bitterness of my spirit, I said, 'I have become a murderess for his sake, and he shuns me: for him I have renounced all hopes of hereafter, and he abandons me in the present life.'—What phase of a woman's mind, think you, then developed itself? Pride came to my aid——aye, and I almost felt as if love were turning into hatred—as if affection were yielding to a thirst for revenge. I grew desperate. I was poor—that is to say, comparatively poor; and I felt that it would be impossible, with my limited income, to maintain the requisite establishment in the mansion where I dwelt. I longed to plunge into pleasure and dissipation that I might drown the feelings which were gnawing at my heart: and then, too, I thought to myself, 'He scorns and hates me: he abhors and shuns me. Oh, if I could obtain a brilliant social position, and if I were to bestow my hand upon one who could give it to me, it would be a revenge that I should be taking upon Henri. As he cares not for me, let me at least affect to show that I care not for him; and, perhaps, when he sees me wedded to another, he will bitterly repent his conduct towards me.'—Thus did I reason, Henri; and accident enabled me, even far more speedily and easily than I had anticipated, to accomplish my aims. You are listening, are you not?"

"I am—I am," replied the Count de St. Gerard, who had resumed his seat and had averted his countenance to conceal his emotions. "Go on, go on."

"Knowing that amongst the French nobility and gentry, who were so well acquainted with my history," continued Adelaide, "and who entertained a general impression of my guilt, I might vainly endeavour to obtain a husband, I resolved to see what the effect of my beauty would be upon English visitors to the French metropolis. It is through no idle vanity that I thus speak of this loveliness of mine. I know that I possess it and I know its power. Arming myself with all my fortitude——I will even admit that it was also with that brazen effrontery to which you yourself have ere now alluded—I went to a ball given by the English residents at the Odeon Theatre. Lord Saxondale was speedily by my side. Shunned by everybody else—finding that my history was much

better known amongst my own countrymen than I had anticipated—I was being subjected to the most humiliating treatment, when that young nobleman came like a moth to flutter involuntarily around the brilliant light which dazzled his gaze. The conquest I achieved was such as perhaps no woman ever achieved before. But I had not been many hours—no, nor many minutes in his society—before I discovered that he was one of the most contemptible of his species. As for love for such a pitiable object, it were impossible, even though I had never loved before! But then he was Lord Saxondale—and, when of age, would enter upon the enjoyment of a brilliant fortune. We were married; and scarcely was the ceremony accomplished, when I would have given worlds to have it undone. My heart smote me with a feeling like a remorse: it seemed as if I had committed a crime towards you. For *then* I remembered that I had never made you the slightest overture—that if you had not written to me, neither had I written to you—that if you had not come to me, I had made no sign to show that I desired your presence. I was seized with an insurmountable yearning towards you: I longed to behold you once more—to ascertain what you felt towards me—to enter into explanations——in short, I felt it was an absolute necessity that I must see you: and hence the pressing letter which I wrote! Nay, I will even say more:—it was in a moment of despair, on the fourth day after my marriage, that I sat down and penned that letter."

"Despair, Adelaide?" observed St. Gerard, his looks displaying much emotion: "why do you speak of despair—you who must be possessed of a mind endowed with an even masculine power?"

"Yes—a masculine power," she repeated bitterly, "to be enabled to do all that I *have* done—to go through so much—to exercise such an incessant control over my feelings—to force myself to avoid the betrayal of what so often agitates in my thoughts——Yes, it does indeed put to the test the utmost vigour and strength of the mind! But you ask me why I use the word despair?——O Henri, you who know me well, can judge for yourself what my feelings must be in finding myself linked to a miserable conceited coxcomb—a self-sufficient puppy—a stripling who is both fool and coward! You know that I possess some intellectual qualifications—some power of conversation—some accomplishments: and you will perhaps pity me when you thus learn the character of him on whom the necessities of my position, and my own rash as well as morbid feelings, urged me so suddenly to fling myself away. And having taken that step, it was requisite to maintain a certain appearance towards this husband of mine. I could not suffer him to think that I had wedded him for his title and fortune only, or in a moment of desperate vindictiveness against yourself; and therefore am I compelled to simulate love. Love!——Oh, my heavens! love for such a contemptible thing as *he!* The idea is preposterous. Can you not now understand wherefore I wrote so earnestly beseeching you, by the reminiscences of any tender feeling you might at one time have experienced towards me, that you would come to me as a friend, even if it were impossible that you still regarded me with love."

"I obeyed your summons, Adelaide," responded the Count de St. Gerard gravely, "because I observed a wild desperation in the language of your letter—I feared lest you might do yourself a mischief—and I was resolved that on no account would I aggravate the griefs which were rending your soul. Besides, as I ere now said, I saw the absolute necessity of coming to a thorough explanation with you, so that after this interview we might separate, never to meet again!"

"Never to meet again?" ejaculated Adelaide. "Now you are plunging a fresh dagger into my heart! Am I not sufficiently unhappy? Oh, have mercy upon me! take compassion upon me! Are you unmindful of all I did on your account? Is not my soul doomed to an eternity of woe in another world?—will you not become its solace for the little space that it may linger in this?"

"Adelaide, what mean you?" cried the Count de St. Gerard: "would you prove faithless to the solemn vows which but a fortnight back you pledged to Lord Saxondale at the altar? would you render me an accomplice in your guilt? No, Adelaide—by heaven! I am incapable of such deliberate villany towards your husband. I feel that it was sufficiently imprudent—almost criminal indeed—thus to seek your presence: but it was to prevent any greater imprudence—and I will also add any greater criminality on *your* part—that I have thus come."

"What!" said Adelaide bitterly, "do you suppose that I am capable of murdering *another* husband for your sake?"

"Adelaide, speak not with this horrible levity! I was telling you wherefore I had obeyed your summons, and why I had come to England. Understand me well, therefore! Everything is at an end between you and me; and neither to the blandishments of your beauty nor the fascinations of your language, shall I yield. I must now depart. Already has our interview lasted too long; and if your husband were to enter——"

"Ah, my husband!" suddenly exclaimed Adelaide: "I had almost forgotten, in the whirl of agitated emotions which your presence has conjured up, the terrible calamity which has just occurred."

"Calamity? and just occurred?" echoed St. Gerard. "Unhappy woman! what new misfortune has overtaken you?"

"My husband," she responded, "has been borne away to a madhouse."

"A madhouse?" cried Henri, starting with amazement. "Is it possible that to crown all the rest, you have espoused a madman?"

"No—he is not mad," she quickly answered: "this is doubtless done by his relatives or friends to separate him from me. You do not know the laws of this country: in many respects they permit the vilest acts of despotism to be accomplished, and afford scope for the exercise of the cruellest vindictiveness. The certificate of two medical men is sufficient to consign any individual to a madhouse; and that terrific engine of coercive oppression has been called into request on the present occasion."

"But this is horrible!" exclaimed Henri, his handsome countenance flushing with indignation.

"Horrible, yes!" repeated Adelaide. "But what matters it to me how *he*—my husband—fares, if you will only speak kind and offer me the solace

of your love? Henri, let me go away with you ——I cannot be your wife—but I will be your slave!"

"Adelaide, speak not thus! it is impossible!" exclaimed St. Gerard energetically.

"What! you would leave me in my present distress?" she cried, in a tone full of anguish;—"and I who now feel that I love you more than ever! O Henri, this is cruel—too cruel. But you do not understand how I am situated. Doubtless those who have taken this step in respect to my husband, do not purpose to leave me tranquil. As yet he is a minor—he has no control over his own fortune—he is at the mercy of his guardians: think you, then, that they will make any pecuniary allowance for *me*? No: every instant do I now expect to receive a mandate to quit this house. My position is most cruel. By the circumstance of marriage, my own resources have vanished——"

"You know, Adelaide, that I commiserate you," interrupted St. Gerard; "and to the extent of my power will I assist you. Fortune has smiled upon me in more ways than one. Not only have my commercial ventures been crowned with success, but the very recent death of my competitor in that law-suit four or five years ago, has given me back the estate which was then wrested from me. Therefore, so far as pecuniary assistance goes, you shall have it, Adelaide."

"No, Henri!" she exclaimed proudly: "it was not to receive eleemosynary charity that I so earnestly courted this interview. I am not without immediate resources: I have some little money of my own which I had brought from Paris——But no matter! It is painful for me to talk on such subjects. Once more"—and here she threw into her looks and her language all the most melting powers of persuasion and entreaty,—"once more do I beseech that you will grant me your love!"

"Speak not thus!" interrupted the Count, in a tone of firmest decision: "it is impossible. No, Adelaide—everything in that respect ended between us long ago, and never can be renewed. Pure and chaste were you when we parted: pure and chaste shall you remain, so far as it depends upon me. There is one service which methinks I can render you—or at least I will endeavour. If I understand aright the exact circumstances of your position, everything depends on the prompt liberation of your husband. Think you that if he were set free, and if he addressed himself to a magistrate for protection—think you, I ask, that it would be refused? Give me the address of the place to which he has been transferred; and I will lose no time in adopting measures for his emancipation."

Adelaide was reflecting profoundly, and likewise in deep mournfulness, as St. Gerard thus addressed her. She saw that it was useless to entertain any farther hope of inducing the young French nobleman to accept her as his paramour; and she therefore, after some deliberation, resolved to avail herself of his services as a friend. For either she must flee away with him, or procure the restoration of her husband. The former seemed impossible: had not Henri said that everything was at an end between them so far as love was concerned?—and therefore she must accept the latter alternative. Besides, by doing this, she would most probably be enabled to see the Count again; and this was what she desired;—for all her pristine love was revived towards him with the fullest power.

"Henri," she said, in a low melting voice, "I accept the proposition you have made me: you shall serve me in this instance. I know not where the place is situate to which they have borne Lord Saxondale away: all that I have ascertained is that the establishment is kept by a physician named Burdett."

"It is enough—I will find it out," answered the Count de St. Gerard: then, as he was on the point of taking his departure, he recollected something, and said, as he laid a card upon the table, "There is my present address in London, should circumstances render it necessary for you to communicate with me. But I beg, Adelaide, that you will not ask to see me again unless those circumstances should prove *very* urgent. I cannot refuse to serve you as a friend—but in no other light. And now farewell for the present."

"Are we to part thus?" said Adelaide, taking his hand and looking with mournful earnestness upon him.

"Yes, yes—we must part thus," he answered quickly: and wringing her hand, he tore himself suddenly away.

As the door closed behind him, Adelaide threw herself upon the sofa—covered her face with her hands—and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER CXXX.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THE dusk of the October evening was setting in—the obscurity was deepening in the drawing-room where Adelaide remained alone; and when that wild paroxysm had somewhat subsided, she slowly removed her hands from her countenance and wiped away the tears from her eyes. She did not however ring for lights: she wished to meditate upon her position—to reflect upon all the circumstances which had this day transpired; and there was something in the growing gloom that was congenial to her own state of mind. Where she sat upon the sofa, the shade was darker than in any other part of the room; and thus, if any person had been present with her, the eyes of such a one would only have been able to perceive that there was a female form half reclining there, but would not have recognised who she was.

It was while the obscurity was thus deepening—and while Adelaide still sat in the depth of that shade—that the door opened, and a livery servant announced "Lord Harold Staunton." The domestic immediately afterwards said, "Your ladyship will have lights brought up?"

"No—never mind the lights," ejaculated Harold: "I shall not detain her ladyship many minutes—and my business is of too much importance to be delayed or interrupted."

The servant accordingly withdrew; and Harold, flinging himself upon a chair at some little distance from the sofa, said, in a voice which denoted a strange tumult of feelings, "Harriet, I am half

mad—I come to make you a proposition—listen to me in patience for a few minutes if you can."

Adelaide was so amazed by this proceeding that she had not at first uttered a word of remark in respect to the way in which Lord Harold countermanded the proposal of the domestic to bring up lights; and now, as he gave rapid utterance to those excited words, she instantaneously comprehended the error under which he was labouring, and that he fancied he was addressing himself to the Dowager Lady Saxondale and not to Edmund's bride. She accordingly held her peace; for the suspicion was strong in her mind that she might probably hear something which would be of service to her;—and at all events, her curiosity was strongly piqued. Harold, firmly believing that he was alone with the Dowager Lady Saxondale, interpreted this silence as an encouragement for him to proceed: and indeed his feelings were too powerfully excited to allow him to pause for any serious deliberation.

"Everything has failed, Harriet," he went on to say, still speaking rapidly. "I followed your instructions in all things—I went to Saxondale Castle—I found the man Chiffin there, concealed in the cloister opening from the chapel; and together did we penetrate into your bed-chamber. One of your maids—Lucilla, I think—was sleeping there; and we alarmed her desperately. But I procured the bottle of poison, and departed. Oh, what glorious visions then danced in my imagination! Methought I saw myself already Marquis of Eagledean: but the whole plan failed—I scarcely know how—suffice it to say that it did. I saw my uncle: it was under circumstances of such a fearful character that we met, I was for the time crushed and spirit-broken: I was converted into the veriest dastard and coward. He upbraided me bitterly—he menaced me with an appeal to the Court of Chancery to cut off the entail of the estates—he threatened me with exposure if I failed to do his bidding. You are listening attentively?"

Adelaide, who was indeed listening in utter amazement, as well as with the liveliest interest, made a movement as if to bid him proceed: but she said not a word.

"Well then, you hear me," he continued in the same excited manner as before: "you see that I followed your instructions, and that everything failed. The Marquis lives: my hopes are defeated—your revenge is ungratified. He ordered me to repair to Sweden; and I quitted him with the intention of doing so. I think I promised that I would—but I scarcely know what did take place on that frightful occasion. I came to London half mad; and in that state have I remained here for the last ten days. I feared to disobey him: and yet how could I obey? I understand his conduct well—I know what he means—I can read it all. He purposes to carry out his threat—to appeal to the Court of Chancery: and he thus ordered me to a distance, that I might not interfere with his plans. Therefore it is ruin for me to obey his mandate; and I know that it is equal ruin for me to disobey. I tell you again, Harriet, I am half wild! My nights are sleepless—my days are one long agony. At length—this afternoon—I learnt by accident that you had suddenly returned to London. I learnt too that Edmund is in a madhouse, and that you had turned his wife out of the house."

Here Adelaide could not suppress an involuntary ejaculation: but as it was brief and curt, it did not betray the different tone of her voice from that of the Dowager Lady Saxondale.

"You are surprised at what I tell you," observed Harold: "but on my soul, I was not prying into your affairs—much less watching your movements! I will tell you how it was. There is an old man in the City—a money-lender, named Musters; and he has a nephew who is a clerk at Marlow and Malton's. They do not know that this particular clerk is his nephew—and he let it drop inadvertently while conversing with me ere now. Well, I went to him to obtain some money ——in a fit of desperation, Harriet, I lost the other night at the gaming-table the whole of the thousand pounds you so kindly gave me at Beauvais ——But I find that I am speaking disjointedly and in broken sentences—you see how agitated I am! However, as I was saying, I went to this Musters—and he told me that you were in London: he told me too—but in confidence—what had taken place, or *was* intended to be done in respect to Edmund and his wife. Not a shilling could I obtain from old Musters: he was liberal enough with his garrulity, but inaccessible with regard to his money. However, the intelligence I received that you were in town, cheered me somewhat; and I rushed off to come hither. Harriet, I have loved and I have hated you:—I have tasted the joys of paradise in your arms; and yet I have at times menaced, coerced, and upbraided you. But now I feel that I do love you—that you are necessary to me—that it is impossible I can remain separated from you! Have I not every claim upon your consideration? I need not allude farther to that which has so mysteriously and terribly, but yet so firmly knitted together certain transactions of our lives. I do not come to use threats, Harriet: I come to make a proposal, and to back it by entreaties and prayers, if it be necessary. On your answer depends my fate. If you refuse, there is no alternative but for me to hasten away to Stockholm, and leave myself entirely at the mercy of my uncle. But no: I feel convinced you will not drive me to this! You will give me your hand—you will let me become your husband in name, as I have already been in fact: and then may I not merely hurl defiance at the Marquis, but *together* we may concert the means of carrying out that which failed the other day. Then, Harriet, you will be the gainer as well as I: you will become a Marchioness—and as you are ambitious, I know that such an elevation above the already high rank you bear, will not be displeasing; while as to wealth, you will enjoy far greater riches than your jointure affords. Now, Harriet, I have spoken candidly: give me your response."

Harold ceased; and there was a long interval of silence. He naturally conceived that the Dowager Lady Saxondale was pondering upon his words—while in reality Adelaide was still a prey to a degree of amazement amounting almost to a stupefaction. In a few brief minutes the most astounding revelations had been imparted to her. Her husband's mother was the instigatrix of a murderous plot against the life of the Marquis of

Eagledean—she had been the paramour of Lord Harold Staunton: and other things were hinted at as having linked their souls in some fearful intimacy—the intimacy of crime! Well might Adelaide be astounded: well might she be transfixed in every limb, and have the power of speech paralysed, even if she had wished to use it at the moment. The gloom had deepened: it was now almost entirely dark in that apartment. Harold still occupied the chair: Adelaide still sat half reclining on the sofa. Nearly five minutes elapsed—and not a word was spoken.

"Harriet, what means this silence?" suddenly demanded Staunton, springing up to his feet. "You mean to refuse me—I am sure you do? It will be the death-blow to my hopes. You think more of my hate than of my love: you think more of the severe and unkind things which have passed between us, than of those intervals of bliss which we have enjoyed in each other's arms. Well, it must be so, then. I promised that I would not use menaces—and I will not. Besides, such menaces between you and me are absurd and ridiculous. Fool that I was to buoy myself up with the hope, even for an instant, that you would assent to my proposition! Your coldness when we met at Beauvais—a coldness which you maintained even when counselling me how to act in respect to my uncle,—that coldness should have told me that you considered everything to be at an end between us. Harriet, why do you not speak to me? Not one single word—only one passing ejaculation—has fallen from your lips since first I entered the room. Do you wish me to depart hence at once? Tell me so—and I will go!"

Adelaide was about to make the young nobleman aware of the tremendous error which he had

committed, when she thought that if by still holding her peace, he might be led to farther revelations in the course of fresh appeals and entreaties, it would be all the more serviceable to her. She accordingly continued silent.

"Harriet, this passes all endurance!" cried Staunton: "you are either treating me with cold indifference, or with contempt. Perhaps you are even gloating over my miseries? perhaps you hate me? and peradventure my sufferings and my humiliation constitute a delicious vengeance for you? Oh, but it is too cruel for you to treat me thus! You should remember what I did for you—the risk that I ran—the guilt I accumulated on my soul! Harriet, speak to me—or I will compel you. I am growing desperate—wild—mad! Harriet, I say, speak to me!"

And as Adelaide still continued silent, Lord Harold Staunton gave vent to an imprecation of rage, as he stamped his foot upon the floor.

"Well then, hear me for the last time," he exclaimed. "I told you that I would not use threats—and I will not: but I will give you a warning. That bottle of poison has fallen into my uncle's hands; and Chiffin confessed to him how it was obtained—that it was procured by me in your room at the Castle. The Marquis, recollecting the suddenness of Mabel Stewart's death beneath the roof of this very house, accuses *you* of the murder; and he points to that poison as the means whereby it was perpetrated. Now, Harriet, listen! If you marry me, my uncle has still so much regard for his nephew that I feel convinced he would take no step to strike that nephew a blow through the medium of one who had become his wife. But unless you marry me, it is impossible to say what course my uncle would adopt. Therefore in an alliance with me there is absolute safety for yourself: you see that it is no threat I hold out—it is a warning that I give! What say you, Harriet? One syllable—yes or no—and my suspense will be at an end."

Again he paused: again was there a long interval of silence. He paced to and fro—but without approaching near enough to the sofa to have his suspicions excited.

"Will you not answer? One would think you dead," he exclaimed, furious with rage, "only that the rustling of your dress is heard. How is it to be, Harriet? Speak! By heaven, I will wring an answer from your lips!"

Rushing forward, he was about to clutch her by the arm, when Adelaide, rising from the sofa, said in a firm and collected tone, "Your lordship is mistaken in the person whom you have been addressing."

A half-subdued ejaculation of horror burst from the lips of Lord Harold Staunton; and staggering back, he sank like one annihilated upon a chair.

"We had better have lights," said Adelaide, pulling the bell; "or the servants will think it strange that we sit so long in darkness."

Not another word was spoken till the domestic made his appearance with two lamps: for he had guessed wherefore he was summoned. As the first glare of light burst into that room, Adelaide perceived that Lord Harold was still sitting in a perfect state of consternation and dismay: but fortunately for him, he was so placed that the servant could not catch sight of his wan and ghastly countenance. The man retired: and then for nearly another minute was the silence prolonged.

"What do you mean to do?" at length asked Harold, slowly turning his haggard looks upon Edmund's wife: for of course he fully comprehended that Edmund's wife it was whom he had thus all along been addressing.

"My lord," responded Adelaide, who, having risen from the sofa, was now standing near the fire-place, her tall and splendid form reflected in more than one mirror, and her countenance revealing a certain subdued satisfaction and triumph beneath an expression of forced serenity,—"you have no right to question me thus: we are perfect strangers to each other."

"It is true, my lady," answered Harold, also rising from his seat, and approaching her, but still pale and trembling: "it is true! And yet the circumstances are so peculiar—the error was so immense—the things I have said must appear so startling—in short, I feel that I am altogether at your mercy——For God's sake, deal leniently with me!"

"Rest assured, my lord," answered Adelaide, "that I shall take no unnecessary advantage of what I have heard. If I avail myself of it, it will not be in spitefulness or malignity: the revelations that have reached my ears, will only serve as weapons of defence in my hands. Do you understand me, my lord?"

"I understand you but too well," rejoined the young nobleman, in mingled bitterness and anguish. "Edmund's mother is in your power—and you will make her feel that she is? Oh, insensate madman that I was——"

"But it is too late to deplore what cannot be recalled," interrupted Adelaide: and a smile of scornful triumph, which she sought not to repress, played upon her rich red lips, revealing the brilliancy of her pearly teeth.

"You will ruin me altogether with her who is now your mother-in-law," exclaimed Harold wildly. "You see what my hope is!—it is my only hope! But do not think that all those things I said are true——No, no—they were the ravings of a fevered brain——"

"My lord," again interrupted Adelaide, "you are going the best way to anger me outright, by endeavouring to persuade me against the evidence of my own senses. Beware how you make a woman fancy that you judge her for a fool: she can pardon almost anything but *that!*"

"No—do not be angry," exclaimed Harold: "you must make allowances for my feelings. From what I have said, you have learnt Lady Saxondale's intentions towards you. I beseech you, endeavour to come to some amicable understanding, whereby you may avoid the necessity of betraying what has just happened with me——Oh, do—I beseech you! Tell me, is there aught I can do to serve you? Command me if you will. I know that I am at your mercy: but again and again I implore that you wil use your power leniently."

"My lord, a promise to that effect I have already given. You say that the Dowager Lady Saxondale is coming hither presently: do you not think that it will be more prudent for you to take your departure ere she makes her appearance?

Perhaps it may not be necessary for me to mention your name at all; and rest assured that I will not travel out of my way to do so. I am too much indebted to you for the important revelations you have made—although so unintentionally to *my* ears—not to feel anxious to show as much gratitude as I possibly can in return."

"With these assurances I must rest contented," observed Harold: but he lingered as if anxious to obtain a still more positive pledge from Adelaide, to the effect that she would hold him harmless. "Farewell, then," he at length added, seeing that of her own accord she would say nothing more, and he not daring to urge her farther.

He issued from the room; and she was once more alone. One short hour had wrought a marvellous change in the state of her mind and in her reflections. When Harold was first announced, she had only just wiped away the tears of bitterness and anguish which she had been shedding; and now an expression of triumph sat upon her countenance as the door closed behind him.

The reader has most probably guessed how Lord Harold Staunton was led into so stupendous an error. From what he had learnt at the hands of old Musters, he fancied that the Dowager Lady Saxondale had already been to the mansion, and had summarily ejected Edmund's wife from the threshold. Accordingly, on speeding with the most excited haste to Park Lane, he had demanded of the servants "whether Lady Saxondale was at home?" forgetting to specify *which* Lady Saxondale it was that he sought,—and indeed not thinking it necessary. The response was of course in the affirmative: and as the Dowager Lady Saxondale was supposed to be still upon the Continent, the servant who gave the answer did not think it necessary to particularize *the* Lady Saxondale of whom he himself spoke. On receiving that response, Harold had begun to ascend the stairs with so much haste that the footman had some difficulty in keeping pace with him—and still greater difficulty in getting before him on the landing to throw open the door and announce him properly. Thanks, therefore, to the gloom in which the apartment was involved, Adelaide had thus gleaned the most important revelations. We must incidentally remark that she had heard Edmund speak flippantly and superciliously of his mother—he had even assured her that the Dowager was too much in his power to show overt aversion to his marriage; and she had wheedled out of him the particulars of the adventure in respect to the masquerade-dress, and of the part which she had induced Harold to play in provoking William Deveril to a duel. From the first, therefore, she had never entertained an exceeding high opinion of Edmund's mother: but still she had felt that she herself knew too little of that lady's misdeeds to be able to convert such knowledge into a weapon either offensive or defensive. But during the hour which was just passed, Adelaide had learnt more than sufficient to compel her mother-in-law to sink down in terror at her feet,—or at least she thought and hoped so.

It was not long after Lord Harold had taken his departure, and as dinner-time was approaching, that the door of the drawing-room was suddenly thrown open, and Edmund's mother made her appearance. It will be convenient if we still continue to distinguish her as much as possible as *Lady Saxondale*,—at the same time signalizing Edmund's bride by her Christian name of *Adelaide*.

Lady Saxondale still wore her bonnet and shawl: for having but that moment arrived at the house, and burning with anxiety to carry into effect the purpose for which she expressly came, she had not even lost the time that would be necessary to ascend to her own chamber and put off her superfluous garments. Nor had she paused to make any inquiries of the domestics; and thus she was not even informed that Lord Harold Staunton had called at the mansion. She entered the drawing-room with mingled disdain and scorn, hatred and vindictiveness, depicted upon her countenance,—while Adelaide rose from the sofa and made a dignified salutation.

"Woman, this is no place for you!" cried Lady Saxondale: then pointing towards the door which she had left wide open, she said, "Begone! pollute not this dwelling any longer with your presence!"

"By what right and title do you issue this mandate?" demanded Adelaide, who was resolved not to come to extremes at once with Lady Saxondale—but to sound as it were the depths of her mind, and obtain a greater insight into her true character and disposition.

"By what right and title?" repeated her ladyship. "It tests my patience sorely to be compelled thus to bandy words with you: nevertheless, as it is quite possible my son may have deceived you as to his real position, it is but just that I should explain it. He is a minor: eighteen months must elapse ere he will come of age; and in the meantime—even apart from other circumstances—all his property is in the hands of his guardians. By their concurrence it is that I exercise the fullest authority within the walls of this mansion, and likewise at the Castle in Lincolnshire. Now, madam, you understand the matter thus far."

"Your ladyship used the terms '*apart from other circumstances*,'" observed Adelaide: "may I request to be informed the meaning of that expression?"

"Well, I will curb my own impatience and gratify you so far as to be explicit upon that subject:"—yet as Lady Saxondale gave utterance to these words, there was an unmistakable malignity in her tone and her look, as much as to imply that her temporary forbearance would be speedily followed by a stern and implacable course of action.

"I am listening, my lady," said Adelaide. "Those other circumstances——"

"They are these:—that inasmuch as there is the best possible reason for supposing my son to be of unsound mind and incapable of managing his own affairs, it is more than probable that steps will be taken at once to ensure the placing of his property under competent management by the time that he comes of age."

"And that management," observed Adelaide, with the ironical tone of a retort, "is doubtless a task which your ladyship is seeking for yourself?"

"I disdain any response to your impertinence," rejoined Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with

an air of glacial hauteur: then again pointing to the door, she said, "Depart, madam: your presence here is more than painful to me—it is loathsome!"

"Your ladyship," responded Adelaide, "must be conscious of far more power over me, than I can possibly acknowledge you to possess, if you think that I shall humbly obey the edict which you have issued with such a queenly air."

"Madam, we will not bandy words," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "Depart hence—or I will summon the menials to eject you."

"Perhaps you will find it more prudent," responded Adelaide, "to exchange a word or two with me in the first instance: and for this purpose I will close the door."

Lady Saxondale was not entirely unprepared for something of the sort,—inasmuch as, knowing Edmund's weakness and flippancy, she had foreseen that it was probable enough he had boasted to his wife of exercising some hold over his mother on account of his knowledge of the masquerade affair and the duel which had resulted thence. But her reputation was already sufficiently damaged in the fashionable world for her to be perfectly indifferent as to anything more that might be said on those subjects. She however suffered Adelaide to shut the door; and then, turning upon her a look of increased disdain, said, "Now, madam, you will be so kind as to let our interview come to as speedy a close as possible, inasmuch as I am anxious to be alone."

"Your ladyship can be alone as soon as you think fit," replied Adelaide, "by the mere fact of seeking another apartment. Fortunately the mansion is large enough to accommodate us both. I have chosen this drawing-room for my own use; and I intend to keep it. I am not so rude as to command you to quit it; and therefore you may remain here if you choose. But if my presence be disagreeable, it assuredly is not I who will take the trouble to relieve you of it:—it is your ladyship who must seek another apartment."

"Madam, you will gain nothing by the adoption of this insolent demeanour. If you have anything to say, let it be spoken quickly:"—and again did Lady Saxondale bend her disdainfully flashing looks upon her daughter-in-law.

"It appears to be a struggle between you and me," replied the latter: and she assumed a demeanour as scornfully queen-like and as stately as the other.

"A struggle—how?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Rest assured that it is a most unequal one, as I will presently prove. Behold! the time-piece on the mantel marks the hour of seven. In five minutes you will either leave this house with your own accord, or I pledge myself that you shall be expelled by force."

"And I, on the other hand," rejoined Adelaide, "declare as solemnly that when the hands mark half-past seven, I will ring the bell and order my dinner to be served up."

"This is a most matchless effrontery!" cried Lady Saxondale, stamping her foot: then as she instantly recovered her glacial dignity of demeanour, she deliberately put off her bonnet and shawl, and said, "Now, madam, will you be speedy with whatsoever you may have to state? Doubtless my unhappy son has spoken lightly and impertinently to you respecting myself;—and you think that you exercise a power over me—perhaps that you hold me at your mercy? If these be your notions, it is well to disabuse you of them at once: for I can assure you that I reck but little for whatsoever you may know concerning me."

"You are self-sufficient and proud, Lady Saxondale. But answer me truly," continued Adelaide, with an ironical smile: "are we not a pair well matched? is there not a certain fitness in the circumstance of my becoming your daughter-in-law? And yet there is this difference—that the world has thrown me off for a deed which I never committed; whereas you fled to the Continent from that society which was prepared to shun you for deeds that you had committed."

"Wretched woman!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale: "do you put whatsoever little failings as a woman may have become known in respect to me, —do you dare, I ask, put them in contrast with the tremendous crime of which all the world knows *you* to have been really guilty?"

"Perhaps, Lady Saxondale," retorted Adelaide, "if the world knew more of you, and could read more deeply into the secrets treasured up in your heart, it would be inclined to brand you with an amount of execration scarcely paralleled and never surpassed."

Lady Saxondale looked hard at Adelaide, but still without suffering it to appear that she surveyed her thus scrutinizingly: and then she said, "It is useless for you to throw out such detestable inuendoes in mere random malignity: they do not come home. See! the five minutes are just expiring. Depart—or I pull the bell to give orders that the lacqueys thrust you hence."

"And I will ask the lacqueys," rejoined Adelaide calmly, "whether they be aware that their mistress was the paramour of Lord Harold Staunton?"

"Wretch! it is the vilest of scandals!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, her countenance becoming crimson, and then turning pale immediately again.

"So far from being a scandal," said Adelaide, "the very closest intimacy existed between your ladyship and Lord Harold——"

"The world knew it," interrupted Edmund's mother: "it was no secret—but it was an honourable intimacy: for we were about to be married."

"Very likely," said Adelaide, with a sneer: "but though the parson has never spoken the nuptial benediction, Lord Harold was your husband in fact, if not in name."

"Enough of this insolence!"—and Lady Saxondale's eyes flashed fire as she advanced to the bell-pull.

"Ring if you will," said Adelaide, still calmly; "and ask the footman who answers the summons, whether the ghost of Mabel Stewart walks at night through the spacious rooms of this mansion?"

Lady Saxondale let the bell-rope slip out of her hand: again she turned ghastly pale—but her eyes burnt like living coals as they were fixed with keen penetration upon Adelaide, whose countenance however was so serenely tranquil that her ladyship could not gather thence whether the words just spoken were a random shot thrown out, or whether they emanated from a more settled conviction. Believing the former to be the case, and speedily recovering her self-possession, she tossed her head

disdainfully; and once more extended her hand to the bell-rope.

"Well, if your ladyship must ring," said Adelaide, "let it be for the purpose of sending off a messenger to Saxondale Castle, in order to ascertain whether a certain person named Chiffin is still concealed there in the cloister leading out of the chapel?"

Once more did the bell-rope leave Lady Saxondale's hand without being pulled: and this time there was a still more visible and a longer continued trouble in her countenance: so that for a few moments she was unable to give utterance to a word. In those few moments she revolved in her mind—quickly as thought alone can thus exercise its power—how it was possible that this circumstance had reached the ears of her daughter-in-law. But when on the Continent she had received a letter from Lucilla, stating how two persons, one of whom was Lord Harold Staunton, had entered the chamber: no mention however was made in that letter of Chiffin *by name*;—but it now struck her ladyship that it must have somehow or another transpired that such *was* his name; and if this were the case, it was perfectly easy to account for the circumstance being known to Adelaide. But still, why should she so pointedly couple Chiffin's name with her's (Lady Saxondale's)?—why so significantly allude to his being concealed in the cloister, as if she herself must necessarily be aware of it?

"Come, madam," she said, "let us put an end to all this idle bandying of words. Do you mean to leave the house? or do you not?"

"It is a quarter past seven," answered Adelaide, indicating the time-piece on the mantel; "and I am still here. If I go forth, it will assuredly be to call on the Marquis of Eagledean, and inform him that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix of his nephew in a certain attempt which was made against his lordship some ten days back."

The patrician lady to whom these words were addressed, could no longer blind herself to the fact that her daughter-in-law had indeed, by some incomprehensible means, obtained a farther insight into certain matters than was at all agreeable;—but if she knew so much, might she not know more? and it was of the utmost importance for Lady Saxondale to ascertain precisely to what extent such knowledge did reach.

"Go on, madam—say what you will," she observed, affecting a disdainful laugh. "We will yet see who will be the winner in this contest which you have provoked."

"I provoked?" echoed Adelaide, with a mocking smile: "this is too much! You come, arrogantly and insolently, to order me from the house: is it not *you* therefore who are seeking to push matters to extremes?"

"We will not dispute the point," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Once more I command you to depart:"—and again was her hand stretched towards the bell-pull.

"Well, if you wish it, I will certainly go," said Adelaide: "but it shall be to inform the Marquis of Eagledean that Lady Saxondale has returned from the Continent—and that if he be desirous of asking her in a court of justice to account for the possession of that phial of poison which she directed Lord Harold Staunton to take from her room at Saxondale Castle, she is now in England to answer the charge."

Lady Saxondale was completely overwhelmed by these words: she saw that she was utterly in the power of that woman whom she had come to eject from the house. Yes—she not merely felt herself to be in Adelaide's power: but she was now filled with apprehensions as to what steps the Marquis of Eagledean might really take against her. To her all this intelligence was perfectly new: for, as the reader has seen, she had held no communication with Harold Staunton since they parted at Beauvais. Having however read no account in the newspapers of the Marquis of Eagledean's death, she had supposed that the plot was either abandoned or else postponed: but she had not the slightest idea that it had been attempted—that it had failed—and that she herself was so seriously compromised. She sank upon a seat, gasping for breath: and for a few minutes that proud, unscrupulous, strong-minded, and almost iron-nerved woman was the very picture of abject terror and grovelling mortification.

"Now, Lady Saxondale," resumed Adelaide, perceiving that her triumph was complete, "it is perfectly useless for us to prolong this warfare. I might, if I chose, tell you more: I might hint at certain dread deeds which have established a terrible intimacy—the intimacy of crime—between yourself and Lord Harold Staunton. But I need say no more. Look, Lady Saxondale!—it is now half-past seven o'clock. I am about to ring: shall it be to order my trunks to be packed up—or to command that dinner be served?"

"Whatsoever you will," responded Lady Saxondale, in a low thick voice. "I see that it is needful for you and me to make terms with each other."

Adelaide rang the bell; and as she turned to do so, a smile of triumphant satisfaction appeared upon her countenance. A footman quickly answered the summons; and she said, with an air as if she herself were the mistress of the mansion, "Let dinner be served. Lady Saxondale and I shall be alone together."

The footman bowed and retired; and the moment the door closed behind him, Lady Saxondale, advancing up to Adelaide, grasped her by the arm, saying, in the same low thick voice as before, "How came you to know all these things?"

"I may not tell you," responded Adelaide.

"But Edmund—does he likewise know them?"

"No—not one tittle beyond what you yourself are already aware that he is acquainted with."

This was at least some relief to Lady Saxondale's mind: but still she was utterly at a loss to conceive who could have been Adelaide's informant; and for a few minutes her pride prevented her from asking any more questions. But, racked with a thousand vague terrors—and these all the more poignant for being so undefined—she said, "If we are indeed to be friends, you will begin your show of friendship worthily by telling me whether I am in any danger on account of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"No—I believe not at present," replied Adelaide. "Ask me nothing more: for nothing more will I avow."

At this moment the door opened; and a page entered, bearing a note upon a silver salver, which

he handed to Lady Saxondale. He then retired. Her ladyship, instantaneously recognising the handwriting, hastened to tear it open; and when she had run her eyes over its contents, she threw a significant glance upon Adelaide, saying, "Lord Harold Staunton has been here; and he gives me to understand that through a terrific error he was led to make certain revelations to you."

"Now therefore your ladyship is acquainted with my authority," responded the daughter-in-law. "His lordship besought me not to compromise him with you; and I readily gave him to understand that I would not."

A servant now entered to announce that dinner was served; and the two ladies descended to the dining-room. Throughout the repast they maintained the most studied courtesy towards each other,—so that the domestics who waited at table, were surprised at this mutual friendliness of demeanour: for they naturally wondered how Lady Saxondale, after having had her son locked up in a madhouse, could thus, by her bearing towards her daughter-in-law, appear to sanction the very marriage on account of which she had adopted so stringent a measure in respect to the bridegroom.

CHAPTER CXXXI.

FARTHER DISCUSSIONS.

It was nine o'clock—and Lord Harold Staunton knocked at the door of Saxondale House. He was at once admitted, and shown into a parlour,—where in a few moments Lady Saxondale joined him. He advanced towards her with the air of a penitent,—while her demeanour was more conciliatory and friendly than he had expected to find it.

"You have forgiven me, Harriet," he said, taking her hand, which was not withdrawn, "for the frightful manner in which I have compromised you?"

"There is now no help for it," she answered: "what is done, cannot be recalled: and I am of course well assured that you did not thus compromise me wilfully."

"Thank you, dear Harriet, for these words," exclaimed Harold, his countenance brightening up. "No—I could not have done such a thing wilfully. I was half mad with excitement, produced by various causes, when I came to the house. I asked for Lady Saxondale—and was shown up into the drawing-room: the dusk was closing in—I beheld a female form seated on the sofa—it appeared to be of your stature and shape; and not for an instant did the idea strike me, that it could be any other but you. I said all kinds of things—I made every sort of revelation——But stay! I recollect now, thank heaven, there was one incident at which I merely glanced; I did not specifically mention it—and Edmund's wife could not possibly understand the circumstance thus alluded to."

"So much the better," observed Lady Saxondale: then, after a few instants' pause, she added, "And yet I am already so deeply compromised with this woman, it would make but little difference if she were acquainted with *that* circumstance also. You enjoined her, Harold, not to betray you to me as the author of all she had learnt: how was it, therefore, that you sent me the note confessing what you had done?"

"Because, on second thoughts," replied Staunton, "it seemed to me better that you should know the whole truth. I fancied that you would at all events be less uneasy—you would be relieved from uncertainty as to the source whence she obtained her information: and moreover, I felt it was so absolutely necessary that I should see you——"

"Well, I understand," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "And now tell me wherefore you are so anxious to see me? and what proposal it is you have to make, and to which you allude in your letter?"

"Then Edmund's wife has not told you everything which occurred between us?—or rather," added Staunton, "she has not detailed in full everything that I said?"

"She merely glanced, though pointedly enough, at certain incidents," answered Lady Saxondale. "But tell me first of all, Harold,—is your uncle exceedingly bitter against me? will he still seek to persecute me? can I remain in England in safety, think you?—for as you may but too easily conjecture, I have many reasons now for staying in London—at least for the present."

"The proposition, dear Harriet, which I have to make," answered Staunton, "will, if accepted, have the effect of insuring your complete safety. Yes—I am certain of it! My uncle does not seek to injure me, though as a matter of course he will cast me off entirely if you become my wife: for *that* is the proposal I had to proffer."

"I guessed as much," answered Lady Saxondale: "I understand your position exactly—and can comprehend the calculations which you have been making."

"And are you offended?" inquired Harold, not knowing what to think of her ladyship's tone and demeanour: for both were exceedingly calm and deliberate.

They were seated together upon a sofa: he passed his arm around her waist, as he spoke;—he drew her gently towards him—she did not resist—she did not manifest annoyance: he embraced her—and she suffered his caresses.

"You are gloriously handsome, dear Harriet," he said, "and I feel that I love you! Yes—I do really love you!"

"And you, Harold, are not entirely indifferent to me," she responded. "After a widowhood of nineteen years—a widowhood that was unstained by one single act of frailty—I abandoned myself to you. All my long pent-up passions then burst forth anew; and I wondered that I could for so long a period have retained my chastity. Now I crave you, Harold—dear Harold; and I accept you as my husband. But you know that I am lost to society—that I am as much an outcast as that vile being who has ensnared Edmund——"

"No matter, Harriet," interrupted Staunton: "we can doubtless manage to make ourselves happy together. Besides, we have a fearful identity of interests in many respects: and perhaps," he added significantly, "there is *more* which we have yet to do."

"Yes—there is *more*," rejoined Lady Saxondale,

with a look full of equal meaning. "I know, for instance, that you have not abandoned that project which has failed——"

"No: and guided by your counsel—assisted by you, Harriet—I will accomplish the aim. But you spoke as if *you* also had something to be done? Is it in reference to this woman—this Baroness de Charlemont who has managed to steal and pilfer the title and name of Lady Saxondale——"

"No—it is not to that wretch I alluded," responded her ladyship. "I shall be enabled to manage her by myself. I understand her character and disposition well—I comprehend her thoroughly—and I have little doubt that we shall come to terms."

"But Edmund?"

"He shall remain where he is. He is better out of the way, for many reasons."

"And Juliana—what has become of her?"

"She remains upon the Continent: she had not the face to come to England in her present condition. She even wondered," continued Lady Saxondale, "that I myself could venture back to the British metropolis, where my name has become a scandal with all those who were once my acquaintances and friends. For perhaps you know that your uncle forced me to sign a paper confessing that it was I who made overtures to that sanctimonious hypocrite, William Deveril; and this paper has been shown to every one who had heard my version of the tale as I originally gave it. But the intelligence of Edmund's marriage came upon me like a thunder-clap; and I was resolved, at all risks and at all hazards, to return to England and take certain steps. I only arrived the night before last: and as you have seen, my measures were promptly adopted. I took up my quarters in a private manner at an hotel: I went and saw Petersfield first—Marlow and Malton afterwards."

"How did they receive you?" inquired Harold.

"Petersfield, with his nonsensical diplomatic airs and his stupid pomposity, was inclined to read me a lecture on the levity of my own conduct. I suffered him to have his say, and expressed my contrition. He was so gratified by my demeanour of assumed humbleness—he thought that his own eloquence had produced such an effect—that he became quite friendly and kind. I therefore had little difficulty in bringing him round to my purposes; and as he himself observed first of all that Edmund must be mad to contract such a marriage, I gave him the credit of making the discovery of this madness—at which his conceit and vanity were still more highly gratified than before. So at last he consented the step should be taken to put Edmund under restraint. With Marlow and Malton it was a still easier game to play: they are lawyers, and look after the money-matters of the Saxondale trusteeship, troubling themselves but little about its morals. Besides, they like making money for themselves; and the more business they can create out of the trusteeship, the higher are their costs and the better they are pleased. They are accustomed, too, to accede to whatsoever Petersfield and myself may suggest; and consequently there was but little trouble in persuading them to consent that Edmund should be transferred to Dr. Burdett's keeping. Burdett married Marlow's sister; and therefore the circumstance of throwing a good thing in Burdett's way, was a further inducement with the lawyers to take this step. You are now acquainted with all these particulars; and it is your turn, Harold, to give me certain explanations. By the bye, I should observe that when on the Continent, I received a letter from Lucilla,—my maid, you know, who remained behind at Saxondale House,—telling me that you and 'some dreadful man' (those were her words) had burst into my chamber there while she occupied it."

"Ah!" ejaculated Harold: "then she recognised my voice? I all along had a misgiving to that effect. Perhaps it is fortunate that the recent plot in respect to my uncle should have failed as it did: for had he been made away with, that circumstance to which Lucilla could testify, might have afforded the first link of a chain which, if followed up, would have brought the deed home to me. Next time, Harriet, such precautions shall be taken, under your able guidance, as to ensure success."

"And now, Harold," said Lady Saxondale, "the explanations I wish you to give——"

"I understand. You mean the way in which the plot failed? From what transpired, it is evident that Chiffin was led to confess everything."

Harold then proceeded to relate those particulars in respect to the meeting with his uncle, which are already known to the reader; and he concluded by stating that Chiffin had been sent away to some foreign clime,—a piece of intelligence which Lady Saxondale was well pleased to hear: for whatever fresh deeds of iniquity she might contemplate, she had no thought of entrusting them to that man, who already knew too much concerning her.

"Now, Harold," she said, "I must tell you what there is to be done on my side. It must be accomplished by you—and when thus accomplished, our marriage shall immediately take place."

"Speak, Harriet," responded the young nobleman; "we are bound to render each other mutual assistance."

"I have learnt," continued Lady Saxondale, "that a certain woman on whom Chiffin made a murderous attack, is retained at the house of William Deveril. This woman bears the name of Margaret Somers; and amongst her own set, is familiarly known as Madge. A paragraph in a newspaper, which I saw yesterday, states that she is in a fair way towards recovery; but that she still lies in a very enfeebled state—and that the faculty of speech has not yet returned. This paragraph farther states that there is evidently something on the woman's mind, which she is anxious to communicate: for consciousness has come back, and she has regained almost complete possession of her reasoning powers,—as is evidenced by the signs she makes to those about her. She endeavoured a day or two ago to write something on a slate: but she could not—a dimness came over her eyes—and she fainted with the bare exertion,—so that the medical man who attends upon her, positively forbade that she should be allowed to make any fresh attempt of the kind. Now, this woman, Harold, is in possession of a secret which, if revealed, would prove my utter ruin. Do not ask me what this secret is: I cannot reveal it. It is a secret which

I would not breathe aloud, even if I stood alone in the middle of a heath, and could see a mile around in every direction, so as to be assured that there were no listeners near. You may therefore comprehend, Harold, that it is a secret of the most stupendous importance; and you may conceive the dire apprehension which haunts my mind, now that I know this woman to be in the midst of a nest of my reptile-enemies."

"It is indeed alarming," observed Harold. "Deveril is assuredly no friend of your's: he is intimate with my uncle, who is likewise a foe——"

"Yes—and it appears that Angela Vivaldi, the celebrated dancer who left the stage some time back, is William Deveril's sister. This girl," continued Lady Saxondale, "is ministering—according to the newspaper paragraph—in the kindest manner to Madge Somers. The journal speaks of her as a young lady of undoubted virtue, most amiable disposition, and generous heart. You may conceive the influence which such a being is likely to obtain over a woman whose mind is attenuated by illness, and whose conscience perhaps is somewhat touched. Besides, there are many reasons why this woman is to be deemed most dangerous by me. She has already extorted large sums of money from me——"

"And what would you have done with her?" demanded Harold. "As for penetrating into Deveril's house, and accomplishing that which Chiffin's knife failed to do——"

"No, Harold: such a course cannot be adopted," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "But the woman can be removed elsewhere, somehow or another——"

"Yes—that is the only plan!" ejaculated Staunton. "Have you already settled any project in your mind?"

"I have," answered Lady Saxondale. "Listen. I will explain it; and you shall then tell me whether you approve of it, and whether you will assist in carrying it out."

They continued to discourse together for some time longer,—indeed, until past ten o'clock; and they came to a thorough understanding as to all matters in which they were so darkly and deeply interested, ere Harold took his departure.

When he had gone, Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room where Adelaide was seated; and taking a chair near, she said, "I think it would be better for both our sakes that we should lose no time in coming to specific terms."

"Such also," responded Edmund's wife, "is my opinion:"—and she spoke with the same decisive calmness as did Lady Saxondale. "What do you propose?—for as you are taking the initiative, you have doubtless some defined conditions and arrangements to suggest."

"In the first place," answered Lady Saxondale, "I must understand whether I have rightly interpreted your feeling in respect to Edmund. You are a woman of strong mind, sound intellect, good talents, and fine accomplishments. You may be well assured that it is not in mere idle flattery I tell you this. I know you to be above the impression which such flattery could alone make upon a frivolous heart. Being therefore as you are, and as I have described you, it is utterly impossible you can have any real affection for Edmund. You coveted a certain social position, with the enjoyment of wealth; and you may have your wishes gratified. In one respect they are already fulfilled: you have exchanged an unappreciated French title for an appreciated English one. As for money, I will be liberal in my offers. Therefore, do you consent that your husband should remain where he is?"

"Does it suit your purpose that he should be there?" inquired Adelaide: then without waiting for an answer to her question, she said quickly, "But of course it does! You will continue to enjoy, even after he has attained his majority, full control over the estates, the mansions, and revenues which belong to the proud name of the Saxondales—unless indeed the wife may in that respect assert claims, rights, and privileges superior to those of the mother."

"Understand me well, Adelaide," responded Lady Saxondale: "I will be all or nothing—I will be omnipotent in the ways which you have mentioned, or I will throw the whole into confusion, so that no one shall reap any benefit. For the Chancery Court, Adelaide, would reduce us both to mere cyphers in a moment; and I have the power of flinging everything into the vortex of that greedy and infamous tribunal. Nay, more:—as Edmund is a minor, a suit in the Ecclesiastical Courts for the dissolution of this marriage into which you have inveigled him—you see I speak plainly—could be successfully maintained."

"Perhaps it might," rejoined Adelaide coolly: "but you would not dare initiate it, in the face of all I have learnt concerning yourself."

"I do not wish that you and I," responded Lady Saxondale, "should assume hostile attitudes—although perhaps I may be less in your power than you think: for Harold Staunton revealed nothing which you could positively and actually lay hold of to serve as an offensive weapon against me. The Marquis of Eagledean will take no inimical step towards me; because it would be compromising his nephew, whom with all his faults he loves."

"But Mabel Stewart?" observed Adelaide.

"Her body would not be found in the grave where it was laid," answered Lady Saxondale, in as calm and collected a manner as that which Adelaide herself adopted. "It was taken up by resurrectionists, and fell into the hands of a medical man who anatomized it completely. However, let us not bandy words in this way: it will only excite ill blood; and we are discussing terms of peace—not the reciprocal modes of carrying on war."

"Proceed," observed Adelaide; "and rest assured that I am as desirous of coming to an amicable understanding as you yourself may be. But I remember that you were speaking ere now as to the feeling which I experience for your son. It is perhaps somewhat too hard to tell a mother ——I see you smile disdainfully——"

"I do," responded Lady Saxondale: "but perhaps you do not comprehend the reason. However, pray go on; and hesitate not to express yourself openly and frankly. We must not stand upon punctilios and niceties."

"I was about to say, then," continued Adelaide, "that your son is assuredly no very loveable object. He is vain without anything to be vain of—conceited without the slightest justification

ADELAIDE SAXONDALE.

for his conceit—naturally ill-tempered where it is safe to display his malignity; but an arrant cringing coward where he has to encounter a spirit superior to his own. In short, he is almost beneath contempt: and now, Lady Saxondale, you can understand full well whether I am a woman likely to entertain any affection for such a pitiful stripling as this."

"I knew full well what your feelings were," said her ladyship, without displaying the slightest annoyance or vexation at this bitter satire which had just been passed upon Edmund. "You do not therefore want him as a husband; and you will consent that he shall remain where he is, so long as you yourself enjoy such happiness as under circumstances you have a right to expect. Now, what I propose is this:—It suits me for the present to remain in London, and therefore to inhabit Saxondale House. To you be the Castle in Lincolnshire assigned as a residence; and I will undertake to induce Lord Petersfield and Mr. Marlow to allow you two thousand a-year. Are my conditions accepted?"

"Yes," replied Adelaide, without an instant's hesitation: "I agree to these terms. But before I leave London I must receive the written assurance of Lord Petersfield that my allowance shall be regularly paid."

"That written assurance you shall have to-morrow," answered Lady Saxondale; "and the day after you will have the kindness to take your departure for the Castle."

"Agreed!" rejoined Adelaide; and having thus come to an understanding, the two ladies separated for the night.

CHAPTER CXXXII.

THE WARFARE OF DUPLICITIES.

It will be remembered that the Count de St. Gerard had taken his leave of Adelaide with an intimation that he purposed to adopt some measures to procure the release of her husband Lord Saxondale; and we must now observe that she did not entertain the slightest intention of frustrating this design, nor of recommending Henri to abandon it. She saw, as already stated, that all hope of winning the French nobleman to her arms must be renounced; and she was therefore desirous, for several reasons, to have her husband restored to her. Towards Lady Saxondale she was playing a very deep game; and it was entirely on the principle of "diamond cut diamond." The threat of a suit being instituted in the Ecclesiastical Courts to dissolve the marriage, had not been lost upon her; and she knew full well that if the marriage should once receive the express sanction of Edmund's mother and guardians, that suit could *not* be entered upon. Now, if a written acknowledgment from Lord Petersfield, guaranteeing the payment of an allowance, were obtained by Lady Saxondale's intervention,—the proceeding would be tantamount to such express sanction of the alliance. This was therefore what the wily Adelaide was aiming at when she accepted the terms proposed by Lady Saxondale.

She was desirous, we have said, that her husband should be restored to her for several reasons. In the first place, she wanted a companion; and it suited her well enough to have one whom she could render altogether submissive to her will. In the second place, she looked forward to the time when Edmund would be of age to enter upon the unrestricted control of his estates and fortune. In the meanwhile she would be strengthening her ascendancy over him: she would rule him by a judicious admixture of terrorism and syren blandishments;—and thus, when his twenty-first birthday was passed, she would enter upon the virtual sway of the broad domains, stately mansions, and vast revenues attached to the proud name of Saxondale. Her calculations descended to the minutest details; and the following was a part of her reasoning:—

"Edmund has been consigned to a mad-house on the pretext that he must have been insane to contract an alliance with me. But if he be emancipated from the asylum, how can he possibly be transferred thither again on the same plea, when the marriage will in the meantime have been sanctioned by the written document to be procured by his own mother from his principal guardian? Or again, if any attempt were made to capture his person once more, we would be upon our guard to offer resistance, and have succour constantly at hand: or we might retire to Italy or some other continental clime—anywhere but France,—and thus remain abroad until the period of Edmund's minority be at an end. And then, when once he enters upon the control of his property, his haughty mother shall indeed be reduced to a cipher; and I will avenge myself upon her who sought to trample me under foot!"

The reader may now fully comprehend the nature of that policy which was the basis of Adelaide's proceedings, and why she had so readily given an assent to Lady Saxondale's proposals. She fancied that Lady Saxondale was completely her dupe, and that her own ulterior designs were not suspected by her ladyship, inasmuch as they altogether turned upon the pivot of Edmund's contemplated release; and Adelaide hugged the idea that Lady Saxondale would be very far from supposing that such a proceeding had been thought of, or would be attempted. But, as will presently appear, it was a complete warfare of duplicities and hypocrisies, dissimulations and treacheries, which these two women were thus secretly waging against each other. Lady Saxondale knew full well that it *was* to Adelaide's interest to procure the liberation of Edmund: while, on the other hand, it was entirely to her ladyship's own interest that Edmund should remain in the asylum as a lunatic,—because on this ground the requisite legal proceedings could alone be taken to perpetuate the control of the property in her hands. The guardians would recommend the mother and not the wife as the most proper person to exercise this control: and indeed Lady Saxondale's plans were so well arranged, that if she could only keep Edmund locked up, she felt confident of success. At the same time we must here observe that although she knew it was to Adelaide's interest to have Edmund set free, she had at present no reason to suspect that a plot was already in existence to accomplish that end.

On retiring to her own chamber after that

conversation with Adelaide which was described in the preceding chapter, Lady Saxondale learnt from her maid that a foreign gentleman who gave no name, had that afternoon called upon Adelaide, and that he remained a considerable time. Her ladyship instantaneously suspected that this must be a paramour—and very likely the Count de St. Gerard himself: for Lady Saxondale was fully conversant with all the particulars of Adelaide's previous history. This was therefore an important discovery for her. If she could only detect her daughter-in-law in carrying on an adulterous intrigue, it would place her so completely in her power that she could reduce her to any terms and crush her into the completest submission. It naturally struck the wily Lady Saxondale that before Adelaide departed for Lincolnshire, she would communicate either personally or by note with this foreigner; and she resolved not only to have Adelaide's movements watched, but likewise to intercept any letter she might send out to the post. She accordingly gave her maid certain instructions; and by means of a handsome bribe, induced her to undertake the task now assigned her.

On the following day Lady Saxondale procured from Lord Petersfield such a document as Adelaide had stipulated for. She represented to his lordship that inasmuch as it would be impossible to carry out a suit for the dissolution of the marriage, in the absence of positive proof that Edmund had really been seduced, inveigled, and beguiled by Adelaide into that match, it would be better to make the best of a bad business and afford the wife sufficient means to maintain herself respectably. By pretending deferentially to consult Lord Petersfield, instead of to dictate her own will—and by otherwise flattering his vanity—Lady Saxondale procured the paper which she desired; and on returning to the mansion in Park Lane, she placed it in Adelaide's hands.

Edmund's wife had already made arrangements for her departure into Lincolnshire; and she fully purposed to proceed thither,—having resolved to dissemble her hopes and aims until her husband should be restored to her, so that no suspicion might be excited as to the existence of a plot for his liberation. When in possession of the document, which was precisely in accordance with her own views, she sat down in her chamber, and penned the following letter in the French language, but a translation of which we lay before our readers:—

"Circumstances induce me to depart immediately for Saxondale Castle in Lincolnshire. Lady Saxondale has returned; and it will therefore be better that I should thus at once absent myself from the metropolis—as in that case no suspicion can possibly arise of the project entertained for my husband's liberation. I need not conjure you to leave no measure unadopted to ensure this end: I know that you will keep your word. When Edmund is free, let him set off at once and join me at the Castle: urge him to do this—tell him that from a conversation which I have had with his mother, it is of the most vital consequence to his interests that we should meet without delay.

"ADELAIDE."

Having sealed this letter, and addressed it to the Count de St. Gerard at the hotel where he was staying Adelaide gave it to her own maid (the one who had accompanied her from Paris) with instructions that it should be immediately sent to the post. The maid, on descending the stairs, perceived several letters lying on the hall-table and which were likewise left there to be forwarded to the post. Accordingly, to save herself trouble, she placed amongst them the one which Adelaide had just given her. Lady Saxondale's maid was upon the watch; and within a very few minutes that particular letter was in the hands of her mistress.

Lady Saxondale, on at once perceiving that it was addressed to the Count de St. Gerard, was seized with the exultant hope that she now held in her possession the damning proof of Adelaide's infidelity to her husband. She opened it very cautiously, in case there should be a necessity to seal it again and transmit it to the Count instead of retaining it in her own hands: and well was it that she took this precaution: for its contents afforded no such evidence as Edmund's mother had hoped to acquire. But it was scarcely of less importance: for it revealed to Lady Saxondale the existence of some concerted plan, having for its object the emancipation of her son. It by no means suited her purpose to intercept this letter altogether; as by so doing, Adelaide might suspect by whose means it had been prevented from reaching him for whom it was intended;—and such an occurrence might lead to an open rupture between Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law. She therefore secured the letter again with the utmost carefulness; and her maid restored it to the pile lying on the hall-table to be forwarded to the post.

Early on the following morning Adelaide took her departure into Lincolnshire. One of the travelling-carriages was placed at her disposal: she was accompanied by her own maid, and attended by a footman who was assigned for this service. Thus Lady Saxondale made every arrangement that might lead Adelaide to suppose her desirous of maintaining as friendly a demeanour as could possibly subsist between the two under such circumstances;—and indeed, from the moment of the reading of the letter, there was nothing in Lady Saxondale's manner to indicate that she had discovered aught of Adelaide's intentions with respect to the liberation of her husband.

But no sooner had the equipage rolled away from Park Lane, than Lady Saxondale ordered another carriage to be gotten in readiness—and drove at once to the office of Messrs. Marlow and Malton in Parliament Street. Mr. Marlow was in his private room, and thither her ladyship was forthwith conducted.

"I have called, my dear sir," she said, after an exchange of the usual compliments, "to inform you that Edmund must be removed to another asylum with the least possible delay."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the lawyer, looking slightly vexed at this announcement for, as already stated, Dr. Burdett was related to him by marriage—and he had expected that his kinsman would reap the full benefit of Lord Saxondale's alleged lunacy. "I hope your ladyship has heard nothing to render you dissatisfied——"

"With Dr. Burdett? No—certainly not," interrupted the lawyer's client. "But I have received positive information—no matter how—that a plot

is in existence for my son's liberation; and the only way to defeat it, will be to remove him, under circumstances of the utmost secrecy, to another asylum. But the choice of such asylum may be left to the discretion of Dr. Burdett himself: he shall be entrusted with all the requisite arrangements; and the quarterly payments for the support of my unfortunate son, can be effected through the doctor's hands. In a word, Mr. Marlow, we will leave Dr. Burdett in his position as custodian of my son,—merely stipulating that the unhappy young man is to be transferred to another place."

"To be sure, to be sure," said the volatile Marlow, to whom this proposition on his kinsman's behalf was agreeable enough. "I will see about the matter in the course of the day. Indeed, I will lose no time; and Burdett shall be equally prompt in making the requisite arrangements. If your ladyship will leave it all to us, I will guarantee that everything shall be completed to your satisfaction within forty-eight hours."

"Forty-eight hours!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale: "it may be too late. During the interval the treacherous plot which is in progress, might be carried out. It is now only eleven o'clock—still early in the forenoon," continued Lady Saxondale, after consulting her watch. "I beseech you, Mr. Marlow, to repair to Hammersmith at once, and see Dr. Burdett. He is sure to be acquainted with some other physician who will receive my unfortunate son; and let the removal take place during the night. I rely upon your promptitude in this matter: for, as you perceive, it is really and truly of the highest importance."

"Then I will at once take it in hand," said Mr. Marlow: and satisfied with this assurance, Lady Saxondale departed.

CHAPTER CXXXIII.

THE SIGN OF "THE THREE CADGERS."

THE reader will recollect that we left Chiffin the Cannibal at the moment that he had effected his escape from the Liverpool constables. When having time and opportunity for mature reflection, the villain deliberated what course he should pursue. It was absolutely necessary that he should take his departure by some means or another for the United States,—not merely to obtain possession of the money which the Marquis of Eagledean had promised to remit thither for his use—but likewise because he found that his native land was getting too hot to hold him. All prospect of being enabled to take his passage in a ship from Liverpool was now put out of the question; and he resolved, after well weighing the position of his affairs, to take a bold step as the best and the only means of accomplishing his object. This was to return to London, and get on board some vessel bound from the Thames for the New World.

"It's pretty sure," he said to himself, "that those who got on my scent at Liverpool, had heard of my having made inquiries about the sailing of the American ships; and it's also pretty sure that they will send up to London to let the authorities there know that they precious nearly caught me, and that I am lurking about in the hope of getting out of the country. So, communications will then be sent off to all the sea-ports to keep a sharp look-out; and it will never enter their heads that I should be bold enough to go back again to London. Therefore that's the very thing I will do: for, after all, London is the place to hide one's-self in."

These reflections were made at a distance of a few miles from Liverpool; and no sooner was the daring conclusion arrived at, than Chiffin began to retrace his way towards the metropolis. In about half-an-hour he reached a railway-station, where a Parliamentary train, proceeding southward, had just stopped. The Cannibal,—excited by his recent exploits at Liverpool, as well as by some liquor of which he had just been partaking at a wayside ale-house,—was emboldened to seek any adventure which might further his views. He accordingly paid his fare, and took his place as a third-class passenger; and on the following day was set down within a few miles of the British metropolis. He roamed about in the fields and rested himself in ale-houses until the dusk was setting in; and then made his way towards the nearest suburb of London. This was Hammersmith,—on entering which, Chiffin bethought himself of a low boozing-ken wherewith he was well acquainted in that neighbourhood and on the landlord of which he could confidently rely, no matter what amount of reward might be offered for his apprehension. For this landlord, by making his establishment a receiving-house for the plunder of the thieves who frequented it, amassed large profits; and, at the same time, he was too much in the power of his customers to betray any one of them,—inasmuch as they would make common cause to avenge such an act of treachery. Here, therefore, Chiffin knew he would be safe; and being much wearied with his day's wanderings, he resolved to pass the night at the sign of the *Three Cadgers*—for such was the elegant appellation of the boozing-ken.

It was shortly after nine o'clock that the Cannibal entered this place, where he received a cordial welcome from the landlord; and passing into the tap-room, he ordered a good supper and plenty of liquor to be served up. Three or four other individuals, of the same stamp as Chiffin himself, and with whom he was acquainted, were regaling themselves there. They were characters of the most lawless and desperate description; and entertaining a high admiration for the Cannibal, they gave him a welcome as friendly as that which he had already experienced from the landlord.

While they were seated in the enjoyment of the various comestibles they respectively fancied, two gentlemen entered the room. One was of exceedingly handsome appearance and elegant apparel; and his mien denoted the foreigner. The other was of middle age—also well dressed—and was evidently an Englishman. The foreigner appeared to shrink back for a moment from the mean and dirty aspect of the place, the cloud of tobacco-smoke which filled it, and the ill-looking fellows who were regaling themselves there: but it was merely with a sense of loathing, and not of alarm, that the Frenchman—for such he was—thus momentarily recoiled.

"Go on, St. Gerard," whispered his English

companion, speaking rapidly in the French tongue: "it is here that you will find the instruments you seek."

"Your knowledge of London life, my dear Lawson," replied the Count with a smile, "does indeed extend to the most extraordinary places."

"I told you so when you communicated your wishes to me," returned Mr. Lawson, as he and his companion seated themselves at a hitherto unoccupied table: then instantaneously going on to speak in a louder voice, and likewise in the English tongue—so as to be both heard and comprehended by the men who were smoking and drinking there—he said, "My dear fellow, as you understand a little of my vernacular, we will discourse therein. You want to see London life in all its phases; and here is one of those public-houses where your desire may to a certain extent be gratified. Here, waiter!" added Mr. Lawson, turning to a dirty pot-boy who was looking for orders: "bring in half-a-dozen of wine, and glasses enough for the whole company. These good fellows here shall drink with us."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson threw down a five-pound note; and the dirty pot-boy, after staring at the two gentlemen with mingled astonishment and admiration for nearly a minute, left the room to execute the bounteous order he had received. At first Chiffin the Cannibal and the other men present—none of whom had very clear consciences—experienced some degree of uneasiness at the entrance of the two gentlemen, whose visit they naturally concluded to be some stratagem of the police: but the observations purposely made by Mr. Lawson disabused them of the idea—and the order for the wine convinced them that no treachery was intended. But Chiffin whispered to the friend seated next to him, "These swell coves pretend to come here to see a bit of London life. I wouldn't mind betting five guineas to as many brass farthings, that they have got some little business in hand which wants such chaps as you and me to help them in;—and so I'll give 'em a hint presently."

The wine was brought, and when the change for the five-pound note was given to Mr. Lawson, he tossed the pot-boy a couple of half-crowns for himself,—thereby establishing a fresh claim upon the admiration and gratitude of this individual.

"Now, my friends," said Mr. Lawson, thus familiarly addressing the ruffians seated around,—"take a glass of wine with us, by way of showing you are not vexed at what may seem an intrusion on our part upon a region so exclusively your own. The fact is, my companion is a French gentleman of fortune, who wishes to see something of London life in all its phases; and as I happen to be tolerably familiar with the lowest as well as the highest resorts of the metropolis, I have undertaken to be his guide."

"And very proper too, sir," answered Chiffin. "Here's your health, genelmen. There's worse wine at other places than the *Three Cadgers'*; and there's more unlikely cribs, too, than this one to look out for chaps when they are wanted to do a little business of a private or delicate nature."

"What do you mean, my good fellow?" asked Mr. Lawson, on whom Chiffin had bestowed a knowing wink as he delivered the concluding part of his speech.

"I mean exactly what I say, sir," responded the Cannibal; "and if you like to take me at my word, do so. Lord bless yer, I know London as well as you do, sir; and I know too that there's a many chaps with good coats on their backs, and a many ladies which flaunt in silks and satins, that stands in need at times of the assistance of such coarse-looking chaps as me and my pals here. If it wasn't so, I'm sure I don't know what would become on us. Do you, Jack?" he asked, turning to the individual seated next to him.

"No—that I don't," was the answer.

"You are uncommon sharp fellows," observed Mr. Lawson, with a laugh. "Well, the fact is I and my companion here do want a little business done."

"I guessed as much, sir," answered the Cannibal. "Speak out."

"Would it not be better, my good fellow," rejoined Lawson, "if you were to adjourn with me and my friend to another room to talk the matter over?"

"Well, just as you like, sir. Come—this way:" and rising as he spoke, the Cannibal approached the door.

"As we take your friend away from you," said Lawson, again addressing the other men, "we leave you the wine as a recompense; and I will also give the landlord orders to bring you in presently a couple of crown bowls of punch."

These announcements were received with much satisfaction; and Chiffin, having procured a candle from the bar, conducted Mr. Lawson and the Count de St. Gerard to a room up-stairs, where they all three seated themselves in a business-like manner.

"Now, my good friend," said Mr. Lawson, "I will endeavour to explain myself in a few words. I need not ask whether you are the man who will like to earn fifty guineas or so?—for you have something so pleasant and agreeable in your looks that they bespeak a readiness to render any sort of service, no matter of what nature, so long as it's well paid."

"I don't know about the looks, sir," observed Chiffin, with a grim smile; "but as for my character, you've hit it off as nice as if you and me had been brought up together from our infancy. And now, tell us what the game is, sir."

"In the first place, as a necessary preliminary," remarked Mr. Lawson, "give us some name whereby to address you. I dare say you have a dozen cut and dried for use as various circumstances may suggest. Tell us any one of them."

"Well, sir, Brown is an uncommon good name," replied Chiffin: "and so with your leave I will be Brown in the present business."

"Good, friend Brown," answered Lawson. "And now for the explanations. You must know that at a little distance hence there is a lunatic asylum kept by a certain Dr. Burdett. This you can promptly find out, if you do not already know where it is. Within its walls a young gentleman—or rather a young nobleman—is confined; and it suits our purpose that he should be emancipated with the least possible delay. Do you think this can be done?"

"Can a house be broke into?" asked Chiffin, with knowing significancy: "and he who breaks

in, can take another person out with him. That's English, I believe, sir."

"And very capital English too, friend Brown," rejoined Mr. Lawson. "But as a matter of course, there is a great deal to be done in the present business. When I tell you who the young nobleman is, you will have to ascertain by some means or another in which part of the building he is confined. Do you think you can manage this?"

"Servants are to be bribed, sir," responded Chiffin, "where there is gold to bribe 'em."

"You shall have gold for the purpose," was Mr. Lawson's answer.

"And who is the individual?" asked Chiffin.

"Young Lord Saxondale," was the response. "But, Ah! you look surprised——"

"It's nothing, sir—don't mind anything you observe about me. Sometimes the mention of names produces an effect on me. I know his lordship by sight: and that's a great help in the present matter."

"It is, Mr. Brown," observed Lawson. "But we are anxious that no delay should take place."

"Not a moment. What's o'clock now, sir?"

"A little past ten," answered Mr. Lawson, looking at his watch.

"Then I'll just step down in that neighbourhood at once, and take a look at the premises. Perhaps there will be some footman or servant-gal going out to fetch beer or what not; and if I can get a glimpse of their faces by the light of a street lamp or the gas of a public-house, I should very soon know whether it would be safe to sound the party on the subject. But you had better leave it all to me, genelmen; and I dare say I shall manage it to your satisfaction."

"Take ten guineas," said Mr. Lawson, "in the shape of secret service money, as the Home Secretary would call it: in other words, use it for bribery and corruption as you think fit."

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting an hour or so," observed Chiffin; "and then I could tell you more about it on my return: for there's a good many things to be taken into consideration."

"Go at once, and we will stop here until you come back. By the bye," added Mr. Lawson, "tell the landlord to send us up some brandy and some cigars."

Chiffin the Cannibal issued forth from the room; and during his absence, which lasted until near midnight, Mr. Lawson and his French friend whiled away the time by means of conversation and the cigars,—doing but little honour to the spirituous liquor. The Count de St. Gerard was in a melancholy mood: but his English friend, being entirely in his confidence, was acquainted with the cause, and studiously avoided any allusion to Adelaide Saxondale. At length Chiffin reappeared; and they both at once saw by the cunning leer of grim satisfaction which was on his countenance that he had tidings of importance to report.

"Well, genelmen," he said, as he resumed his seat, "I think the business will be easy managed now. When I went down to the neighbourhood of the madhouse, I lurked about, making my observations in respect to the premises, and waiting to see whether anybody would come out. First I saw a footman—then a savage-looking chap that I suppose was a keeper—and then another feller that seemed as if he was a gardener or labourer on the grounds. Well, it was this third chap I got hold of: we went and had a glass together; and I slipped some money into his hand. So then he let out that Lord Saxondale was going to be removed this very night to some other place—but where, he didn't know. Dr. Burdett's carriage was however ordered to be ready at half-past eleven. So I told the gardener-chap he must find out where it was going to take young Lord Saxondale, and I would give him some more money. He agreed—and I waited a little while in the public-house till he came back. He brought me the news I wanted: for he had listened to catch the orders that Dr. Burdett gave the coachman after young Saxondale was put with a couple of keepers safe in the carriage."

"And what was the destination?" inquired Lawson, anxiously.

"Dr. Ferney's, in Conduit Street," replied Chiffin. "And that's a name too——But no matter. I think from some little knowledge I have of matters, I can do your business, genelmen, as well as possible: but it can't be done, you know, to-night. It's too late."

"To-morrow night?" said Lawson, after exchanging a few whispered words with the Count de St. Gerard.

"Yes—to-morrow night, without fail," rejoined Chiffin. "I stake my reputation on it; and when I say that, I say everything."

"No doubt, friend Brown," observed Lawson. "You seem so confident of doing the business that perhaps you may think yourself justified in telling us at what hour, punctually, we are to have a post-chaise in readiness in the immediate neighbourhood of this Dr. Ferney's dwelling, that Lord Saxondale may be borne away beyond the reach of pursuit and danger?"

"I tell you what, genelmen," answered Chiffin, when he had reflected for a few moments; "let the matter stand in this way;—that punctually at one o'clock to-morrow night, you can have a post-chaise-and-four in Hanover Square: but if so be anything should happen to induce me to think it necessary to alter my plan so as to make it an hour earlier or an hour later, you must tell me where I can let you know; for I have got to see another party, to consult him on certain particulars."

"Well, well," interrupted Mr. Lawson, "let the arrangements stand as you have suggested. My house is in Clifford Street, Bond Street"—and he mentioned the number—"at no great distance, you perceive, from the scene of operations. My friend here"—alluding to the Count—"will dine with me to-morrow evening; and therefore, if you have anything to communicate, you can send a note or call at my abode. If we hear nothing from you and see nothing of you up to midnight, we shall conclude that the arrangement stands good. And now take thirty guineas as an earnest of our liberality: and if you succeed in effecting the liberation of Lord Saxondale, we shall not stop at the fifty guineas originally alluded to as the price of your services. But one more word, Mr. Brown. What if you should fail? and what if you should be arrested in the midst of the failure? Can we rest assured that you will hold us harmless?"

"It would do me no good, genelmen, to peach

against you," responded Chiffin, as he gathered up the money.

"No: and besides," added Mr. Lawson, "we might be of service to you if you got into trouble—which we could not be if we ourselves were involved in the same dilemma."

"To be sure, genelmen," rejoined Chiffin: but he thought to himself that if he did happen to get arrested it would be hard work indeed for his two present employers to save him from the gallows: he did not however consider it worth while to name this small circumstance to them.

"We will say good night, friend Brown," observed Mr. Lawson: whereupon he and the Count de St. Gerard took their departure.

"Now," said Chiffin to himself, "I must without loss of time make the best of my way to old Bob Shakerly, who knows all about the ins and outs of Dr. Ferney's dwelling; and he will moreover give me safe and comfortable accommodation at his own crib till to-morrow night. It's rather hard, though, not to be able to get to bed, so precious tired as I am: but these swell chaps appear to be liberal enough—and the more money I get hold of before I start for America, the better."

CHAPTER CXXXIV.

EDMUND AT DR. FERNEY'S.

MEANWHILE Dr. Burdett's private carriage was rolling through the maze of London towards Conduit Street. The windows were drawn up—the blinds drawn down; and Lord Saxondale sat inside, with a keeper on his right hand, and another placed opposite to him.

He spoke not a word: deeply depressed—miserably desponding, the young man was almost completely spirit-broken. Vainly, when first conveyed to Dr. Burdett's establishment two days previously, had he protested against the outrage: vainly had he declared his sanity: vainly, too, did he have recourse to prayers and entreaties—even the most abject beseechings—that his freedom might be restored. He found that he was entirely a prisoner—and that it was the intention of those around to keep him so. Exhausted with the excitement of his feelings, and the passionate outpourings of his intercessions, he had fallen into that depressed state in which we now behold him. Thus was it that he had slept soundly throughout the night following his captivity;—and the whole of the two following days he had wandered about in the spacious garden attached to Dr. Burdett's establishment. That he had for a moment thought of escape, was but natural:—when however he perceived how well the asylum was guarded, and that the walls were bristling with chevaux-de-frise like any prison, he abandoned the transient hope and relapsed into despondency. Thus the time had passed; and when late in the evening of the second day it was intimated to him that he was about to be removed elsewhere, he appeared for the instant rather pleased than otherwise at the idea of anything in the shape of novelty; but almost immediately sank down again into gloomy despond. Thus to those around him had he the air of a sort of melancholy madness.

We must now explain how it was that Dr. Ferney's mansion in Conduit Street was about to receive Edmund Saxondale. The reader has already understood enough of Dr. Ferney's character to observe that he was a man who devoted himself to the medical art, rather from an intense love of the study in all its branches, than from simple motives of gain. He had rendered himself a proficient in anatomy—he was a profound chemist, inventive as well as analytical—and he had lately thought of turning his attention to the peculiarities of the human mind. When once the idea occurred to him that his thirst for knowledge in the profession to which he was devoted, would experience some gratification in psychological study, he resolved to enter upon it. The phenomena he had observed in respect to the mind of the Earl of Castlemaine, gave an impulse to this desire on Dr. Ferney's part to push his researches and extend his observations in the sphere of the insane—or rather of those whose intellects developed peculiar aberrations and idiosyncracies. He had therefore caused a portion of his house to be fitted up in a manner proper for the reception of two or three patients; and scarcely were these arrangements completed, when opportunity furnished him with the means of forwarding his views. Amongst the few intimate friends that he chose to possess, was Dr. Burdett; and to this gentleman had he communicated the purpose which we have just explained. When therefore Mr. Marlow hastened to Dr. Burdett and informed him of Lady Saxondale's desire that her son should be secretly and privately transferred elsewhere, this physician immediately suggested Dr. Ferney's house as one where the patient would experience the best treatment, and would be kept in a greater seclusion than a large and regularly-established asylum could possibly afford. Mr. Marlow had not the remotest idea that Lady Saxondale was acquainted with Dr. Ferney; and even if he had known that she was so, he would still have been far from suspecting that there were portentous secrets existing between them. In short, the lawyer saw no reason why Edmund should not be transferred to the physician's house in Conduit Street: but, on the contrary, he saw every reason to regard this place as most eligible. Accordingly, Dr. Burdett despatched by a messenger, a few hurried lines to Dr. Ferney, to intimate that he would send him a patient in the middle of the coming night; and fearful lest by any accident the letter should be lost or peered into by its bearer, Dr. Burdett forbore from mentioning the name of the patient who was to be thus transferred to Dr. Ferney's care.

To return to the thread of our narrative. The carriage rolled through the streets of London; and half-an-hour after midnight, stopped at Dr. Ferney's residence in Conduit Street. The physician, who had duly received his friend Burdett's letter, was sitting up in expectation of this arrival. Mr. Thompson, who still continued to reside with the worthy doctor, had long before retired to rest,—leaving his benefactor to attend to his own avocations. When the carriage stopped, Dr. Ferney came forth from the front door,—his footman, who had likewise sat up, remaining in the hall. First one keeper alighted, and bade the

young nobleman follow: the mandate was obeyed by the crushed and spirit-broken Edmund:—the other keeper was close at his heels—and in this manner was he received by Dr. Ferney, who ushered him into the house.

"Dr. Burdett, sir," said one of the keepers aside to Ferney, "will write or call to-morrow, to make you acquainted with such circumstances regarding the patient as it may be necessary for you to know."

"That will do," answered Ferney. "But, by the bye, your master omitted in his note of to-day to mention the patient's name."

"I was ordered to explain, sir," responded the keeper, "that this was done purposely; inasmuch as there is some treachery at work, endeavouring to effect the young nobleman's liberation. But his mother and guardians feel convinced that it is absolutely necessary for him to remain under constraint; and his presence at your house must be kept as secret as possible."

"But who is he?" inquired Dr. Ferney.

"Lord Saxondale, sir," was the rejoinder: and as the keeper, having thus spoken, looked around to assure himself that the patient was in complete security, and that there was no avenue of escape, he did not observe the startling effect which his announcement had produced upon Dr. Ferney.

Almost immediately afterwards the two keepers took their departure: the footman locked, bolted, and chained the front door; and the physician remained alone in the parlour with his patient. And this patient was Lord Saxondale, the son of that woman whom Ferney had so long loved, but whose real name and rank were only so recently made known to him!—that lady, too, whose deep damning guilt was so marvellously brought to his knewledge—and who had knelt at his feet as a murderess, imploring that he would not send her to the gallows! Yes: the son of that woman who for so many long years had been the idol of his almost sainted worship—that woman whom he had loved with a devotion as pure as it was unfailing, as holy as it was unextinguishable,—the son of that woman was now beneath his roof!

Such were the reflections which swept hurriedly through the mind of Dr. Ferney when the keepers had taken their departure—when the house was locked up—and when he was alone in that parlour with his patient. Until this occasion Lord Saxondale was personally unknown to him;—and now, as he contemplated that short, thin, slightly made young man, he could trace in his features not the slightest resemblance to Lady Saxondale. The mother had hair of raven blackness—Edmund hair of yellowish brown: the former had eyes large and dark, and flashing fire—the latter eyes which can only be described as of the ignoble hue of greenish grey: the former was characterized by an aquiline profile—the latter with features mean and vulgar. There was something grand and magnificent in the appearance of Lady Saxondale—something despicable and paltry in that of Edmund. Never was there such dissimilitude between two individuals bearing such relationship to each other!

Dr. Ferney was amazed: but his was not a countenance that vividly exhibited such a feeling; and therefore Edmund, who sat looking up at him, noticed not the sentiment his presence inspired. Gradually strange ideas began creeping into the mind of Dr. Ferney. His memory travelled back to bygone days: he retrospected to that period when he was first acquainted with Lady Saxondale—and to the incident which had to a certain degree linked them most mysteriously together. Slowly turning aside, Dr. Ferney raised his hand to his brow, and murmured to himself, "My God! my God! if it should be so—and if I have been instrumental——But, no: it cannot be! And yet if not *that*, what *else?*"

The unhappy man was well nigh overcome by these dread misgivings—these dire apprehensions, which had arisen in his soul: but still Edmund Saxondale observed not the physician's emotion—for he had cast down his eyes, and had relapsed into the profoundest despondency. He had seen that the entreaties and prayers addressed to Dr. Burdett were so unavailing that he had not the heart nor the courage to repeat them over again to this new custodian to whom he was entrusted: he had heard too the locking of the front door—and the sound had smitten upon his ear like the knell of any new hope that for a moment he might have formed. Presently he became aware that the physician, with whose very name he was unacquainted, was approaching him; and looking up from the sofa where he sat, he was as much surprised as suddenly delighted to observe the truly compassionate manner in which Dr. Ferney was regarding him.

"Pray tell me who you are, and where this house is situated?" said Lord Saxondale, whose habitual arrogance and flippant air of assumption had yielded beneath the heavy weight of humiliating adversity: "for Dr. Burdett told me nothing more than that I was to be removed elsewhere—and the carriage that brought me hither, had the blinds down."

"My young friend," responded the physician, in a kind tone, and seating himself by Edmund's side, "I will give you such explanations as you may require. My name is Ferney—and this house is in Conduit Street. Believe me, you shall be treated with the utmost kindness. Every day, when it is fine, we will go out in my carriage together; and when in the open country, we will alight and walk—for there is but a very small garden attached to this house——"

"But my dear sir," interrupted Edmund, still cheered and encouraged by the physician's words and manner; "I really am not mad. I know that I have been foolish, headstrong, and infatuated—and that I did a very mad action: but still I am in the full possession of my intellects. My mother and guardians have treated me infamously in having me locked up. I know that it is all my mother's and old Petersfield's doing: they are at the bottom of it. But question me on any subject you like; and you will see whether I give you rational answers. I know why I have been pronounced mad: it was because I fell desperately in love with a very splendid creature ——love at first sight——and the circumstances were so peculiar, that I married her. It was all done in a few days—as quick indeed as it could be done. But a single mad action does not prove thorough and complete madness in all things."

"It is now so very late, my young friend," observed Dr. Ferney, "that we had better post-

pone all farther discourse until to-morrow. Immediately after breakfast I will devote an hour or two to hear all that you may have to say."

"And if you are satisfied that I am not mad," exclaimed Edmund, now catching eagerly—indeed with the liveliest avidity, at the hope of speedy liberation, "what will you do?"

"I will assuredly recommend Lady Saxondale and your guardians to restore you to freedom."

"Ah! if it depends upon them, it is useless," observed Edmund, shaking his head gloomily, while a shade again fell upon his countenance. "I believe my mother hates me: she has told me as much. She once called me a viper that she had cherished to sting her. Was not that pretty language for a parent to hold to her son?"

"She spoke thus to you?" said Dr. Ferney, in a slow interrogative tone: and again he contemplated the young nobleman with a sort of melancholy interest, in which there was blended a certain strange expression, as if his own heart was enduring a sense of anguish.

"Yes—and often, for some months past, has she said things of this sort," replied Edmund. "I know that she hates me; and what is more, she is a bad woman—I am convinced she is, in many respects——"

"Enough! enough!" suddenly ejaculated Dr. Ferney, with a vehemence which appeared singular indeed to Lord Saxondale. "I beseech you, my young friend," he almost immediately added, "to ascend to the chamber prepared for you; and I renew my pledge that to-morrow, after breakfast, you shall unburthen your mind fully to me."

"With that assurance I must remain contented:"—and as he uttered these words, Edmund rose from his seat.

Dr. Ferney rang the bell; and the footman re appeared, bearing a chamber-candle. The physician shook hands cordially with the young noble-

man,—who was then conducted by the domestic to the bed-room arranged for his accommodation, and adjoining which there was another chamber really intended for a keeper, but where the footman himself was to sleep, at least for this night. For the announcement made by Dr. Burdett to the effect that he was about to send Ferney a patient, had reached the latter so late, and had come so unexpectedly upon him, that he had not as yet found time to procure the services of a regular keeper; and whether he would have to do so at all in respect to Lord Saxondale, he had resolved should depend upon the nature of the discourse to be held with the young nobleman on the following day.

It was long past one o'clock in the morning when Edmund was conducted to his chamber. Dr. Ferney did not immediately seek his own—but remained in the parlour, absorbed in profoundest thought. An hour thus passed; and then Dr. Ferney, taking a light in his hand, ascended to the suite of apartments to which Lord Saxondale had been consigned. By means of a pass-key he entered, without the necessity of disturbing the footman to obtain admittance. The domestic immediately started up as Dr. Ferney entered: but the latter, placing his finger to his lip to enjoin silence, continued his way into Edmund's room.

The young nobleman slept profoundly. The physician closed the door behind himself, and remained in that chamber for upwards of five minutes. When he issued forth again—and as the light which he carried in his hand, threw its rays upon his countenance — the footman, who occupied the ante-chamber, noticed that his master was very pale, and that despite the wonted serenity of his look, there was a certain trouble and agitation visible beneath the surface. Dr. Ferney passed on without uttering a word—and issued forth, closing the door and locking it with his private key. And when the physician reached his own chamber, did he immediately seek his couch? did he at once put off his apparel and woo the slumber, of which, at that late hour in the night, or rather early hour of the morning, he might naturally be supposed to stand so much in need? No: he paced to and fro for a long time; and if any one had been listening at the door of his apartment, the sounds of sobs and other tokens of anguish would have been heard issuing from within. At length he retired to bed; but whether, when his head pressed the pillow, and sleep, wooed by exhaustion, sank upon his eyes, the subjects of his waking thoughts pursued him in the shape of dreams, we cannot say. He rose—little refreshed, more pale than usual, and with a certain haggardness of look—at seven o'clock: an hour, according to his invariable custom, was passed in his laboratory or his museum; then he sought the breakfast-table—and afterwards the promised interview with Lord Saxondale took place.

It was about noon; and Dr. Ferney's carriage was in readiness to convey him to some place where he intended to call,—when a handsome equipage drew up near the house; a short stout elderly individual alighted—and on being shown up to the physician's drawing-room, gave the name of the Marquis of Eagledean. Dr. Ferney had just terminated a long conversation which he held alone with Lord Saxondale: he was anxious to go out—and he could have gladly dispensed with the necessity of receiving a visit professionally. Nevertheless, he was a man of too much courtesy to refuse to see the nobleman who thus called; and he therefore hastened to the drawing-room. He had no previous acquaintance with the Marquis of Eagledean—indeed, had scarcely ever heard of him: for few persons in Dr. Ferney's sphere of life had less knowledge than he of high names and sounding titles,—those only being familiar to his ear with the owners of which he professionally came in contact.

"I hope I am not intruding, Dr. Ferney, upon your more important duties," began the Marquis; "but I wish to speak to you on a subject in which I am more or less interested; and I am induced to address myself to you, having recently read in a scientific publication of certain wondrous discoveries you have made in the branch of chemistry."

Dr. Ferney bowed in acknowledgement of the compliment thus implied; and the Marquis of Eagledean went on.

"I must briefly observe, Dr. Ferney, that by certain means, a small phial—containing, I believe, an active poison — recently fell into my hands——"

"Ah, indeed!" murmured the physician, horrible associations and even fears springing up in his mind: for he instantaneously thought of that phial which Lady Saxondale had stolen from him, and with which she had done such murderous work.

"Yes—that is my belief," continued the Marquis, imagining that Dr. Ferney had merely become interested in a philosophic sense in what he was saying; and not for a moment suspecting that he was smitten with any deeper feeling. "I was at first inclined to try the effect upon some animal —such as a cat or a rabbit: but I had not the heart to do so: and as I have something more than a sentiment of mere curiosity urging me on, I resolved to bring the phial to you, that you may either at once confirm my belief, or else submit the fluid to an experimental process."

While the Marquis of Eagledean was thus speaking, the physician nerved himself with all his fortitude to meet whatsoever revelation might farther be made: for the conviction was settling in his mind that it was the stolen phial, with the poison of his own elimination, which was about to be produced. Perhaps it was because the image of Lady Saxondale was so completely uppermost in his mind, and because certain new impressions relative to her character had just been made upon him during his conversation with her son,—perhaps, we say, it was for these reasons that a phial of active poison, accidentally falling into another person's hands, should so immediately identify itself in his imagination with the one pilfered from him by her ladyship.

"Here it is," said the Marquis of Eagledean; and the physician's apprehension was confirmed it was his own phial—and he full well knew the deadly properties of the liquid it contained!

"My lord," he answered, "I feel honoured and flattered by the compliment you pay me by thus appealing to whatsoever little scientific knowledge I may possess in this matter. I am sure your lordship will not take it to be offensive, when I state that I am particularly pressed for time to-day: my

carriage, as you may have observed, is waiting at the door——"

"I beseech, Dr. Ferney," exclaimed the Marquis, rising from the chair, "that you will not put yourself to any inconvenience on my account. I will leave the phial with you. In a few days I shall be in London again; and I will do myself the pleasure of calling. Meanwhile you will perhaps examine the contents."

"I will, my lord—I will," responded the physician, with a nervousness which he could not altogether subdue, but which the Marquis merely took to be the impatience of one who was sorely pressed for time.

Lord Eagledean accordingly departed forthwith.

"Thank heavens! this tell-tale phial and this fatal fluid have come back again into my hands:" —it was thus that Ferney murmured to himself when he was once more alone: then hastening to his laboratory, he secured the bottle in a cupboard amongst other chemical preparations.

The physician having done this, descended to his carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to Saxondale House. The mistress of the mansion was at home; and Dr. Ferney was invited to ascend to the drawing-room where she was seated. As he followed the footman thither, he lingered somewhat on the stairs in order to compose his feelings ere once more finding himself in the presence of that woman who for long, long years he had so fondly loved, but whom he knew to be a murderess! He entered the apartment with a look of mingled mournfulness and severity,—mournfulness because he reflected that one whom he had thus cherished as the idol of his soul's worship, and whose beauty was so magnificent, was deeply criminal; and severity, because he felt the necessity of exercising as strong a control as possible over his own emotions, in order that Lady Saxondale might not think he could in any way sympathize with the black deed which he had nevertheless promised to retain inviolably secret.

The moment the footman announced his name, her ladyship gave a sudden start—but so slight to outward appearance, as not to be noticed by the lacquey; and instantaneously recovering her self-possession, she assumed her most affable air—her most winning look—as she advanced to greet the physician with an affected effusion of warmest friendship. She seized both his hands before he could possibly anticipate that movement on her part, or avoid it if he had wished; and bending upon him the whole power of her brilliant eyes, she said, "My dear Dr. Ferney, you know not how rejoiced I am to behold you beneath this roof."

The physician had come prepared to remonstrate—to argue—to upbraid—to dictate: but all his resolves were melting away beneath the ineffable spell which that woman had the power of wielding over him. And she too—subtle being that she was—knew full well the mighty force of this influence which she possessed. She had divined at once that he came for no agreeable purpose; and whatever it were, she sought to disarm him beforehand of any resentment that might have been provoked, or of any sense of duty which remorseful or scrupulous feelings might have re-awakened,—in a word, to neutralize at once whatsoever aim he might have in view, if hostile to her own interests. Still, therefore, did she bend upon him the full blaze of her magnificent eyes,—throwing into that flood of lustre a degree of tenderness which from those orbs had never shone upon him before: so that he was dazzled and bewildered—he felt his head turning as if with intoxication—while the contact of her warm fair hands, which still grasped his own, increased this inebriety of the senses.

"Now, my dear friend—my best and most esteemed friend," said Lady Saxondale, "come and sit by me, and tell me what has procured for me the pleasure of this visit: because I know full well that your time is so devoted to professional and scientific pursuits, it is not a mere complimentary call you are making."

Dr. Ferney felt ashamed of himself at having yielded, even though it were only for a few moments, to the inebriating influences of Lady Saxondale's beauty. He literally writhed beneath the humiliating idea of his weakness:—the sense of that duty which he had to perform, acquired power in his mind;—again did his look become mournfully severe; and rising from the sofa where she had made him sit down, he stood before her—folded his arms across his breast—and said, "Lady, I must forget the past so far as it regards my own heart. Would to God that I could likewise forget all the incidents which, belonging unto that past, have been so deplorably connected with *you!*"

"Are you come to upbraid me for what cannot be recalled?" asked Lady Saxondale in a voice of melancholy reproach,—while inwardly she was frightened at the look and manner of the physician, who seemed as if he had at length escaped from the fascinating influence of her image, or was enabled to exert sufficient moral power to throw that influence off. "Tell me my dear friend—are you come to upbraid me," she repeated, "for those things which, having been done, cannot be undone?"

"That is not altogether my object," replied the physician, as he still stood before her with folded arms. "Oh! how is it, Lady Saxondale," he cried, with a sudden access of excitement, "that you, whom I have loved so long and with so sublime a worship, should have proved mine evil genius? Woman, I feel that my conscience is blackened with crimes on account of you! The world looks upon me as one who leads a pure and stainless life—as a man too enthusiastically devoted to the noble art which he professes to have thought, or leisure, or opportunity for anything beside. The world looks upon my countenance—beholds it pensively serene—and imagines that if there be any wrinkles there, they have been traced by closest study and by vigils of research: but little is it deemed how deep a remorse my soul now cherishes!"

As the physician went on speaking, dire apprehensions gathered and strengthened in the mind of Lady Saxondale; and she felt that she must exercise all her arts, all her wiles—and bring into play all her powers of fascination and cajolery, to level that man once more in submissiveness and blind obedience to her feet.

"Dr. Ferney," she answered, rendering the cadences of her voice as musically mournful and tenderly melting as she possibly could, "know you not that I am already the unhappiest of women, and that it would take but little to make me grasp the

dagger or imbibe the poison of a desperate suicide? And will you, Dr. Ferney—you whom I have looked upon as my best and dearest friend—you for whom I have perhaps entertained a feeling which reciprocates your own, but the existence of which I have never until this moment confessed to your ears,—will *you*, I ask, take any step that shall help to drive me to that fearful consummation?"

"O my God!" exclaimed Ferney, pressing his hand to his wildly throbbing brows, "is it possible that you do really love me?——No, no—I cannot believe it! You tell me so now for reasons of your own: for, alas! alas! I cannot blind myself to the fact that you are a woman whose soul is a compound of duplicities and treacheries—you are a woman stained with crimes—possessing a fiend's capacity for mischief under the guise of that grand and glorious beauty! And I too," continued Dr. Ferney," with passionate vehemence,—"I too have been rendered, though heaven knows how unconsciously at the time, an accomplice in the stupendous fraud which you have perpetrated!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, becoming white as a sheet, and her lips livid, as she half-started from the sofa: "would you allude to that mystery?—would you allude to it, I ask? Remember your solemn pledge—that whatever its nature might be, it is *my* secret, and you would never make the slightest attempt to penetrate it!"

"But what, Lady Saxondale," responded the physician, fixing his eyes penetratingly upon her, "if accident should have brought about circumstances leading to a thorough revelation of the motive?"

"Enough, enough!" murmured Lady Saxondale, in a hoarse voice: "there may be listeners!"—and starting from the sofa, she sped to the door of the apartment. "No—fortunately we are unheard by others," she said, having opened the door and looked forth.

"See, unfortunate woman," remarked the physician, "what it is to have a guilty conscience. A single word flying out from within these four walls, may be like a spark to a mass of gunpowder, and cause an explosion of all the fabrics of duplicity and crime you have built up,—burying yourself in the ruins!"

"Now, Dr. Ferney," said Lady Saxondale, approaching close up to him, and laying her hand upon his arm, while she looked with tender entreaty into his countenance,—"I beseech you to sit down by my side—throw off this strange manner which you wear—speak to me as a friend—but speak in whispers,—and tell me what has occurred, that you have come thus to upbraid me now?"

The physician suffered himself to be so far persuaded that he did sit down by Lady Saxondale's side upon the sofa; and for a moment an expression of triumph appeared upon her countenance: for she felt confident that whatsoever had transpired, the physician was still to a certain degree within the silken trammels which love had woven about his heart.

"Listen to me, Lady Saxondale," he said, not daring to look at her as he spoke: for he again felt the magical influence of her charms. "I have several subjects to touch upon. In the first place, that phial of deadly poison—that phial which you took from my laboratory—how came it in the possession of the Marquis of Eagledean?"

"What!" ejaculated her ladyship, amazed at the new turn which the physician's discourse had thus abruptly taken: "are you acquainted with the Marquis?"

"Never before this day. He brought me the phial for analyzation——"

"And you have kept it? you have kept it?" interrupted Lady Saxondale, eagerly.

"Oh, yes indeed! I have kept it!" answered the physician: "and never more shall it quit my possession."

"No—keep it, keep it—destroy it—or at all events give it not back to the hands of the Marquis of Eagledean."

"Ah! unhappy woman, I comprehend!" said Dr. Ferney, an expression of renewed anguish sweeping over his countenance: "it is the evidence of some fresh crime which you are thus desirous should be withholden from the hands of the Marquis."

"Solemnly do I swear," quickly responded her ladyship, "that no fresh crime has been consummated."

"What, then, am I to think?" asked the physician:—"that it was meditated, but that it failed? Oh, my heavens! is it all a dream? or is it a hideous reality? Can one of such splendid beauty as yourself be so darkly criminal?"

"Spare me—spare me!—continue not these bitter upbraidings!" murmured Lady Saxondale: and seizing the physician's hand, she held it between both her own. "Now tell me what else has transpired?"

"Lord Saxondale," answered Ferney, slowly withdrawing his hand, and looking her ladyship full in the face, "is an inmate of my house."

"Of your house?" she repeated: "of your house?"—and she gazed in a sort of wild astonishment upon Ferney. "What means this? what circumstances have brought it about? Are you resolved to ruin me? have you got him there to serve such a purpose? Oh, am I deceived in you? are you no longer my friend? do you hate me now? Why—why seek to drive me to distraction?"

"Calm yourself, Lady Saxondale—calm yourself, if you can," answered the physician, alarmed at the terrific excitement which she had just manifested. "Edmund was last night transferred from Dr. Burdett's asylum to my house——"

At this moment the door opened; and Lady Saxondale suddenly assumed an air of composure as a domestic entered to present a letter which had just arrived. It was from Mr. Marlow, and briefly announced "that on the previous night Lord Saxondale had been carefully and secretly removed to the abode of a very eminent physician, Ferney by name, and who resided in Conduit Street." This letter was a source of infinite relief to the guilty and intriguing woman, inasmuch as it proved to her in a moment that it was through no hostile intent Dr. Ferney had become the custodian of Edmund—but that a strange coincidence in the chapter of accidents had consigned the youth to his care. Glancing round to assure herself that the domestic who brought the letter had retired, she said to Ferney, "This is from my solicitor, announcing that Edmund *is* at your house."

"And last night," responded the physician, "when Edmund slept, I entered his chamber stealthily—he awoke not—and I discovered——"

"Enough!" interrupted Lady Saxondale, in a low thick voice: "think you that I cannot comprehend your meaning? But listen to me, Dr. Ferney—listen to me! That secret is *mine*: you will not make use of it—you cannot—it would ruin yourself as well as me. Of what avail to do this?"

"Oh! think not, think not," interrupted the physician, "that I can drag on my miserable existence with this dreadful load upon my conscience! No: whatever be the results either to you or to me, I must perform an act of justice towards some one who is perhaps wronged——"

"No, no," ejaculated Lady Saxondale vehemently: "you must not—you cannot! No one is wronged! Believe me—Oh! believe me, when I solemnly assure you of this. I am at your mercy: not merely my character, but my life is in your hands. Now, Dr. Ferney—be your decision promptly given: for I will submit two alternatives for your consideration. The first is, that if you will spare me—if you will continue to keep the seal of utter silence upon your lips in respect to all the past—I will be everything to you! I will be your slave—your mistress—your paramour: I will submit myself to you—I will clasp you in my embrace—I will return you a thousand-fold that love which you have so long borne towards me! That is one alternative. The other is this:—if you tell me *now* that on going hence it is for the purpose of avowing everything and laying bare all that I have conjured you to conceal, I will seek my own chamber—and there will I plunge a sharp-pointed knife deep down into this bosom which covers a tortured heart!"

As she thus spoke with a vehemence which was more or less assumed, Lady Saxondale suddenly tore open the front of her dress and revealed the snowy grandeur of her bust. The deed was an exquisite piece of acting, and had an air perfectly natural. It was the crowning act of *finesse* on the part of this wily woman. At the same time she threw so much frantic wildness into the expression of her countenance, as to confirm the belief on the physician's part that the proceeding was all unstudied,—so that he *did* imagine he beheld before him a woman goaded to the very verge of desperation.

But in one sense Lady Saxondale had mistaken Dr. Ferney's disposition. Believing that the love he had cherished for her was allied with sensuous passion, she thought to subdue him altogether, and by bringing him into her arms, enchain him more firmly than ever to her interests; and in order to accomplish this, the unprincipled woman was prepared to abandon herself to him. But she smote him only with pity and commiseration—not with maddening passion.

"Lady Saxondale," he said, gazing upon her countenance with an expression ineffably compassionate, and not upon that bared bosom with desire,—"you know me not—you understand me not! Were you not thus frantic—thus driven to desperation—I should consider that you had insulted me to the most painful degree. Adjust your raiment, I beseech of you!"—and he suddenly averted his eyes.

Lady Saxondale hastened to do his bidding, for she feared lest some one should enter: but still she saw that her empire over the physician was regained through the medium of the pity with which he was inspired, if not by the passion which she had sought to excite. Little, however, did it matter to her how he had become enmeshed again in her silken chains, so long as he was thus rendered captive.

"Yes—you have misunderstood me," he went on to observe: "you have not rightly comprehended my character. For nineteen long years have I loved you—but with a love the holiest, the chastest, the purest. Alas! I feel that this love is stronger than myself: it has become interwoven with the very principles of my existence. Were you a fiend in female shape, I must still love you all the same: the interview of this hour proves to me that it is so! I came to give you the positive assurance that I would perform an act of duty at all and any risk: and, behold! I am weak and powerless, disarmed, unnerved, in your presence. No, no," he continued, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and almost as if he in his turn had become a suppliant, "I conjure you not to lay violent hands upon yourself! Oh, not for worlds would I sully the purity of that love—the sanctity of that adoration—which I have experienced for you! You yourself may be the foulest and uncleanest wretch alive: but my love has been a worship—and it shall not be polluted. I will not sell my compassion for the enjoyment of your charms: I shudder at the idea of compelling you to abandon yourself to my embraces as the price of your security. I will not hurt a single hair of your head. No—by heaven, no! I will drag about with me my remorse as a prisoner drags his chain: the dread secrets of which my heart is a depositary, may eat like iron into that heart—may corrode every fine feeling there—may cover with rust the brightest sentiments of my soul: but still I will not seek relief for that harrowed conscience by betraying *you!* I will be a criminal—I will do anything sooner than drive you to despair. See, Lady Saxondale—see, Harriet—what a power you wield over me!——Oh. I shudder when I think of it—and yet do I kiss the chain!"

It is impossible to convey to the reader an idea of those highly-wrought feelings which inspired the physician as he thus gave vehement utterance to that long and partially broken speech. *There* was a man naturally endowed with the noblest sentiments and loftiest thoughts—a man of splendid genius and brilliant intellect—a man who within himself possessed every element of virtue, and who amongst the good of this world might have shone as the best,—*there* was this man, we say, altered,—changed,—with feelings distorted, sentiments warped, mind made morbid, soul rendered attenuate,—and all by the indomitable influence of the love which he cherished! And this man too, while consenting to become the accomplice of crime as he had already been made its agent,—here was this man, with what may be termed the idiosyncracy of virtue, refusing the recompense of vice—allowing his love to render him criminal, and yet having strength of mind to reject the reward which he might have grasped! Truly such a love as this exists not often in the world,—a love that could keep itself chaste

and holy while prompting him who possessed it to trample upon all the scruples of conscience!

"My dear friend—my ever dear friend," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, in a tone of joyous enthusiasm when she saw how completely he was vanquished, "you have inspired me with new life. Oh, I must embrace you as a friend——only as a friend!"

"No, Harriet," responded the physician, abruptly rising and retreating from her: "it must not be so. To me at least you shall never appear in the light of a wanton. But now with regard to that unfortunate young man. This morning I have discoursed with him for a long time; and on my soul! it were unjust to keep him captive for another minute."

"What!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale; "after this mad alliance which he has formed——"

"And yet he is not mad," answered Ferney.

"He *is* mad, I tell you!" rejoined her ladyship vehemently: "even your own science may sometimes err. At all events I conjure you to keep him for a day or two until I shall have had time to see those who must be consulted in this matter. My dear friend, you must do nothing by halves: my interests guide me in all my proceedings——I will explain no more now. You have promised me much: is it too great a tax upon your friendship——"

"Good heavens!" murmured Ferney, almost wringing his hands as he spoke; "if you bade me sell my soul to Satan, I should obey! Edmund shall remain captive at my house."

With these words the physician turned abruptly away, and quitted the room.

The moment the door closed behind him, an expression of exultant satisfaction appeared upon the countenance of Lady Saxondale, and rising from her seat, she surveyed herself in the mirror. She had indeed good reason to be proud of her magnificent beauty; for by the power thereof she had triumphed over all the virtuous scruples of a man who was naturally good, but who under the influence of his fatal love was prepared to sell his very soul to Satan rather than harm a hair of her head.

But when turning away from that mirror, and when the first flush of thrilling exultation was past, Lady Saxondale could not help feeling—and deeply feeling too—that many and great difficulties lay before her. It was impossible that Edmund could be left at Dr. Ferney's. His presence there would sooner or later re-awaken remorse in the physician's conscience; and the next time it was so, he might go and act at once under a sudden impulse, and without first coming to warn her of his intentions. Edmund must therefore be removed. But whither? This Lady Saxondale at present knew not. She however made up her mind to call personally on Dr. Burdett, and give him her own instructions without sending them through Marlow. For a few days, she felt convinced, it would be safe enough to leave Edmund where he was: and in the meantime she could make new as well as effective arrangements for his future keeping.

CHAPTER CXXXV.

A CHAPTER OF LOVE.

On the same day, and at the same hour when the preceding scene took place, we shall find the beautiful Angela Deveril seated by the bedside of Madge Somers at the villa near the Regent's Park. The woman lay sleeping: her countenance was hideously pale—and her strongly marked features had become more peaked and angular, likewise as a result of the all but fatal illness which had followed the murderous assault she had sustained at the hands of Chiffin the Cannibal.

And, Oh! what a contrast did that countenance form with the lovely face of her who was watching in the room. For Angela was assuredly the most lovely of all the lovely females who have crowded upon the stage of this narrative; and certainly the world never presented a more ravishing embodiment of female charms. The dark dress that she wore, was fastened up to the throat: but the bust which it so modestly concealed, displayed its own rounded contours by defining as it were the shape and set of the *corsage* of that dress. Tall and slender, without leanness—on the contrary, with all the proportions justly modelled—her figure blended elastic litheness with graceful elegance. No longer now did the short drapery of the dancer display the rounded symmetry and straightness of the lower limbs: but still their sweeping length might be traced beneath the folds of her present raiment;—and when she rose to tread lightly across the room for any purpose, the exquisitely-shaped feet might be seen, and perhaps a glimpse caught of the delicate ankles. Her shining dark hair waved in ringlets about her classic head, and drooped upon the sloping shoulders. As the light from the window fell upon that hair, it seemed to crown that head as with a glory, so rich was the velvet gloss of those dark masses. The dazzling purity and transparency of her complexion was described in one of the earliest chapters: nor less was justice then done to the large dark eyes, so full of fire,—not the fire of sensuous passion, like that which floods the saloons of pleasure; but a fire, holy, pure, and ineffably bright, like that which burns upon an altar in a temple. Yes—ravishingly beautiful and beyond all description lovely, was Angela Deveril—but not less amiable and virtuous than physically enchanting.

If we peep into the room on the occasion specifically mentioned, we shall observe that there was a slight expression of pensiveness, not exactly merging into mournfulness, on the lovely countenance of Angela Deveril. The coral lips were slightly apart, affording a glimpse of teeth which it is a poor simile to liken either unto ivory or to pearls; for they outshone both,—the first in the purity of their whiteness, the last in their exquisite enamel. Her eyes were partially bent downward,—thus showing to the utmost advantage the lines of long, thick, silken lashes which fringed them. Yes—she was reflecting somewhat seriously perhaps, but not in a melancholy strain: for the young heart, when beating with its first love, has more of hope than fear blended therewith; and even while scarcely conscious of the real na-

ture of the feeling, yet does it experience and appreciate its luxury.

Of whom was Angela thinking? and had she settled herself thus to think of some one? or had his image stolen insensibly and unconsciously into her mind? Yes—it was so. For when the soul has become an elysium of love, it does not at once purposely and deliberately light itself up with the silver lamps which shed a soft and perfumed lustre around; but gradually and of its own accord, as if by magic power, does the gentle flood of roseate light pour in, to reveal the image which the heart has enshrined there. Thus was it with Angela. Her patient had fallen off to sleep: the young maiden had at first taken her embroidery; but feeling a disinclination for it—she scarcely knew why—she had taken a book:—then, still without knowing why, she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and thus she had abandoned embroidery—she had abandoned book—and gradually fell into a certain train of thought, which, as we before observed, had for her a certain serene and sweet luxury, greater than either the recreation of embroidery or book.

Young Cupid, the God of Love, though but a mere boy, is not without the most cunning experience: he knows full well the nature of every heart with which he has to deal. Into that which is characterized by strong passions, and belongs to a fervid and glowing temperament, he sometimes rushes precipitately, confident of being enabled to take the citadel by storm, without resistance, and enthrone himself in empire there. In the heart, too, where the feelings, though untainted by sensuousness, are nevertheless susceptible as the sensitive plant and move to the slightest touch—or as the Æolian harp, which acknowledges the sway of the slightest zephyr,—therein likewise does young Cupid frequently alight with a sudden bound, giving no warning of his approach. All this constitutes what is called love at first sight: but it is not always the most permanent. For an empire that is easily won, sooner or later satiates its conqueror with the very glory of his triumph: and so does young Cupid sometimes vanish away from certain hearts as abruptly as he entered them. But very different is it with that heart where the feelings lie deep—where modesty, and innocence, and artlessness constitute barriers preventing them from being too accessible to tender influences, and yet properly sensitive in respect to all generous sympathies,—where the passions lie still deeper down, kept in subjection by the same defences, and beyond the reach of undue provocatives. Into such a heart as this young Cupid cannot plunge headlong: he cannot take it by storm. Were he to make the endeavour, his presence would shock instead of pleasing: he would be recoiled from as an insolent intruder; and with drooping wings would be compelled to turn in humiliation away. Full well does Cupid know all this; and therefore, with characteristic cunning, he enters stealthily and silently—he makes no noise—he breathes not a syllable—no, not even the name of him on whose part he comes: he flutters not his wings—he twangs not his bow—he proceeds gradiently and cautiously, like an army that enters by surprise into the midst of a fortalice in the depth of night. Then—even when the entry is made and the admission is obtained—Cupid goes not roughly on, as a man pushes his way through a dense forest, rudely thrusting aside the opposing boughs and snapping perhaps some of the branches: but he proceeds as one makes his way through a parterre of flowers in a lovely garden, gently and delicately picking his path amidst the floral beauties, so as to trample upon none—to break none—nor so much as to bruise a single slender stalk, nor to shake off one single quivering rose-leaf. And having gained the depth of such a heart as this, young Cupid still plays a prudential part: he does not raise a shout—proclaim a name—set up an image—and call upon that heart's feelings to fall down in worship at once. No—he does not immediately make his presence known: he settles himself there; and he begins lightly and delicately to whisper to those feelings, that they may begin to vibrate softly and gently, as the leaves of a grove are faintly waved by the first kissing and wooing of the evening breeze. Thus is it by gradual steps and slow proceedings that Cupid makes his presence known in the heart to whose depths he has been compelled so stealthily to enter.

And so it was with Angela Deveril. In her young heart did Cupid sit: there had he enthroned himself—and she only just beginning to be conscious of his presence! There too had he set up an image—and she scarcely daring to admit to herself that she had caught the name of the idol which young Cupid, in soft and gentle whisperings, was calling upon her to worship! And that image—was it not the image of Francis Paton?

But let us return to the thread of our narrative. Madge Somers slept; and Angela Deveril was seated in that room which the woman had occupied ever since the evening when Chiffin's knife dealt her a blow which had so nearly proved fatal. The reader has learnt, from certain communications made by Lady Saxondale to Lord Harold Staunton, how Madge Somers had all along remained deprived of the faculty of speech—how, after consciousness had returned, she showed by signs that she had upon her mind something whereof she yearned to unburthen herself—and how she had sought to write afterwards upon a slate, but had not been able. Therefore William and Angela knew full well that the secret she had to impart was of no ordinary moment—but that it was one of vast importance: though what, they could not possibly conjecture. They ministered unto her with the most unwearying attention,—not merely because they felt that her's was a life which, involving such a secret, was of importance to themselves—but likewise because they possessed hearts of the sublimest generosity. A nurse had from the very first been engaged to watch by night; and when this attendant snatched a few hours of necessary rest during the day, Angela took her place. We must not forget to mention that William Deveril was a constant visitor at Lady Macdonald's house in Cavendish Square; and frequent also were the visits which her ladyship and Florina paid to Angela at the villa. The closest intimacy—the sweet intimacy of sisters—had sprung up between the charming Florina and the ravishing Angela: while Lady Macdonald, though in many respects a worldly-minded woman, had conceived an almost maternal love for William Deveril's beauteous sister.

Angela, then, as we have said, was seated in the sick chamber on the occasion to which we particularly refer. Her brother had gone to pay his wonted visit in Cavendish Square: but he was to return soon,—for though devoted to her who was to be his bride, yet he never neglected his sister. Indeed, who that knew her, could neglect her? An angel in beauty and in mind as well as in name, this charming heroine of our's was one whom it was impossible to treat with coldness.

There she was seated; and insensibly her thoughts had settled upon the image of Francis Paton,—when presently Madge Somers awoke. It was strange to behold the earnest gratitude and affection which mingled in that woman's countenance, as she turned her eyes upon Angela. The lion, it is said,—forgetting his ferocity as regal ruler of the forest,—will crouch down at the feet of an immaculate virgin; and assuredly the influence of Angela's kindness had subdued the fierce feelings and melted the hardened callousness of this woman's heart. Doubtless she felt that she owed her life to the ministrations of the young maiden; and having passed through as it were the very entrance of the valley of death itself, only to be drawn forth by that fair angel-hand, she would have been something less or something more than human if she had not thus felt and appreciated the true Christian sympathy and tender compassion which had influenced Miss Deveril's conduct towards her. The moment she awoke, Angela arose from her seat; and approaching the bed, bent over the invalid; and in the sweetest tones of her fluid voice asked whether she felt refreshed by the few hours of slumber she had enjoyed? Madge Somers made an affirmative sign, accompanied by another look of ineffable gratitude; and Angela presented her with some cooling beverage. When Madge had imbibed a small quantity, she made a sign that she wished to write.

"No," answered Angela; "I dare not give you the slate. Recollect," she continued, with the sweetest deprecating look, "how you fainted the other day when you endeavoured to write—and how positively the doctor ordered that you were not to be permitted to make the attempt again."

But Madge Somers repeated the sign, accompanying it with that imperiousness and petulance of motion which invalids often show when the faculty of speech is temporarily lost; and as Angela again spoke her objections—but in the sweetest manner—the woman's countenance exhibited great distress. Angela knew not exactly what to do. On the one hand she was afraid of irritating or exciting the invalid by a refusal; and moreover she was naturally anxious to learn what the important secret was, which so closely concerned her brother. But, on the other hand, the orders of the medical man were imperative. Madge Somers perceived Miss Deveril's hesitation; and as if determined to profit by it, repeated her signal more imperiously than before. Angela could no longer refuse: but she resolved that at the slightest evidence which the woman might show of faintness and weakness, she would compel her to desist. She therefore gave her the slate; and by gently propping her up with pillows, placed her in a position the most convenient for the task which the invalid had undertaken.

Joy and satisfaction lighted up the countenance of Madge Somers as she thus received the slate and the look which she bent upon Angela Deveril, was as much as to say that if she could only unburthen herself of the secret that lay upon her mind, she would no longer dread a relapse which might lead to death. Having flung that look, she evidently mustered all her energies for the purpose which she had undertaken; and the young damsel, helping to sustain her, watched Madge Somers with no small degree of anxiety and suspense. Oh! if the secret, whatever it might be, were about to be made known? Oh! if, when William returned, she could show him that secret pencilled upon the slate? Madge Somers began to write: slowly and painfully did she form a few letters; her hand trembled so that the strokes she made were all irregular and wavy. With increasing suspense and anxiety did Miss Deveril watch her: but by the time she had written these words—"*William Deveril is the s*——" a sudden faintness came over her. Angela snatched the slate from her hands: and here the task terminated.

Madge did not swoon off completely; but for upwards of a quarter of an hour she was as if about to faint away. When she recovered somewhat, she made a sign to have the slate again: but this time Angela was decisive, and would not consent. The invalid submitted; and soon afterwards relapsed into slumber. William Deveril now returned home from his visit to Cavendish Square; and Angela showed him the writing upon the slate. They were both lost in conjecture as to what the completion of the sentence might have been, when a carriage rolled up to the front of the villa—and the Marquis of Eagledean was speedily announced. To his lordship the writing was also shown; but he was no better able to guess what would have been the sequence, than were his two young friends.

"It is no use for us to waste our time," he said, "with ineffectual imaginings: in a very short while the woman will either be able to complete the sentence by writing it, or to communicate her meaning verbally. Until then we must have patience. Now, my young friends, I will tell you wherefore I call upon you thus unexpectedly to-day. We are all longing to have you at Edenbridge; and really we can postpone the pleasure no longer. You, Angela, will make yourself ill by too constant watching in the sick-room: you must have change of air, even if it be only for a couple of days. Now, what I propose is that you both come with me at once into Kent. You have faithful and trustworthy servants who will see that the invalid is duly cared for; and the nurse is a respectable, honest-minded woman. Not for a moment would I counsel you to leave the unfortunate creature, if I were not assured that she would be well ministered unto during your absence. It shall only be for a couple or three days, if you will: but come you must. You, William, sit down and pen a hasty note to Florina: tell her that I have carried you off. And you, Angela, give orders to your maid to pack up at once whatsoever things you intend to take with you."

"But, my lord," responded Angela, "the poor woman up-stairs will miss me so much, that I am really afraid——"

"She would miss you much more, my dear

Angela," interrupted the Marquis, "if you were to be laid up for the want of air."

"But I can assure your lordship I take sufficient exercise," rejoined the damsel. "Every evening I accompany William for a walk——"

"Well," continued the Marquis, laughing, "I certainly cannot say that your cheeks have lost their bloom: but still I feel convinced that the air of Edenbridge will do you good. Now, it shall only be for two clear days on this present occasion. With that understanding, will you come?"

Angela looked at William, and saw by the expression of his countenance that he felt how impossible it would be to refuse their kind benefactor's invitation: and perhaps there was a secret feeling in her own gentle heart which likewise added its influence to other circumstances, thus inducing her to assent. She hastened up-stairs; and entering the sick room, approached the bed where Madge Somers had just wakened up again.

"Do not be annoyed at what I am going to say—do not distress yourself, my poor woman, I

beseech you. I am going on a little visit to the Marquis of Eagledean for a couple of days—— only two days, I can assure you; and then you will see me here again. Meanwhile everything will continue to be done for your comfort; and on my return I hope to find you considerably improved. Farewell, then, for the present. Remember, only two days—and I shall be here again!"

It was thus that Angela spoke to the invalid woman, whose countenance at first expressed blank consternation at the intelligence,—as if she thought that those to whom her secret was to be revealed were to be separated from her altogether. But as the young damsel went on speaking, Madge's face cleared up: for she doubtless felt that it would be the height of ingratitude and selfishness to exhibit signs of displeasure at the brief interval of recreation which Angela proposed to take.

The preparations were speedily made—the fullest instructions were given to the domestics in respect to the care to be taken of Madge—the note was despatched to Florina—and William Deveril, with his sister, accompanied the Marquis of Eagledean to Edenbridge Park. There the brother and sister were most cordially welcomed by all the inmates. Mr. Hawkshaw had taken his departure: but Mrs. Leyden and Henrietta were now staying at the mansion—and thus there was a complete party.

It was on the second day after the arrival of William and Angela at Edenbridge, that the scene we are about to describe took place. Let the reader picture to himself a sumptuously-furnished room, with the casement open, and the sun shining brightly in: for although the autumn was touching upon its close, and winter was nigh at hand, the weather was unusually superb. The grape-vine which climbed up the front of that wing where this apartment was situated, was not as yet denuded of all its leaves—nor had all its clustering fruit been plucked: and although the foliage which did remain, bore the sere autumnal tints, it nevertheless proved agreeable to the eye of any one seated in that room. And whom shall we find there? The beauteous Angela—and all alone, too: for Lady Eagledean, with whom she had been conversing, was summoned forth on some pretext by the Marquis. We say *pretext*, because it was so; inasmuch as his lordship had a reason for desiring that Miss Deveril should thus be left alone for a few minutes, until a certain person might receive a hint that she was there by herself and that he might seek her if he chose.

Always beautiful—always ravishing, Angela was on this occasion more exquisitely beautiful, if possible, and more irresistibly ravishing than when we last described her. This time it was a white dress that she wore, but fastened up to the throat; for in her raiment she observed a strict virginal propriety. Her hair was in ringlets; and its darkness contrasted with the snowy drapery covering the shoulders and the neck on which those glossy ringlets showered down. The white apparel seemed to set off her exquisite shape to the fullest advantage,—making her seem even taller than she was, and enhancing the sylphid grace of her figure.

She was expecting the return of the Marchioness of Eagledean to the room, when the door opened—and instead of her ladyship, Francis Paton made his appearance. The youth, as the reader is aware, was of the same age as Angela: and we need not say that he was a perfect model of masculine beauty at that time. Indeed it would be difficult to find a more interesting pair than this which that room now contained. The colour heightened somewhat upon Angela's countenance as he made his appearance;—while on *his* cheeks it went and came in rapid transitions; and his heart fluttered like that of the most timid damsel. The reason that Miss Deveril experienced less emotion than he, was because she was totally unsuspicious of what was about to take place: whereas Frank had come with the settled purpose of avowing his love——if he had the courage.

He advanced timidly—and for a few moments was unable to give utterance to a word. At length he said murmuringly, "Miss Deveril, you return to London to-morrow. Some weeks may elapse ere we see each other again—weeks grow into months—and months constitute an age."

"I do not think, Mr. Paton," answered Angela, whose voice was likewise tremulous—and she bent down her eyes as she spoke,—"that months will elapse before I may have the pleasure of visiting your family again: because his lordship has my brother's promise that the moment the poor woman is enabled to leave our house, we are to pass some weeks with you."

"Oh, you have promised *that!*" exclaimed Francis, enthusiastic pleasure lighting up his countenance. "But still," he almost immediately added, as a partial shade came back upon his femininely handsome features, "even if you were to revisit us in a week, it would be an age all the same till you did return."

Angela knew not what to say: she felt that she was blushing—her eyes were again bent down—and for a few moments there was a pause, which if not painfully awkward, was at least full of a delicious confusion for both.

"Miss Deveril," suddenly spoke Francis, "you will not be angry with me for what I am about to say? It is with the consent of my parents that I thus address you. Miss Deveril——Angela ——I love you——Tell me, may I hope?"

Deeper grew the blush upon the maiden's cheeks—so deep that deeper it could not become; and her heart beat audibly. She could not give utterance to a word: but she extended her hand to Frank, who seizing it with rapture, pressed it to his lips. Then, sinking upon his knees at her feet, he exclaimed, "O Angela! you have made me so happy, I know not how to give expression to my feelings. But I love you——Oh! I more than love you—I worship, I adore you: and my life shall be devoted to prove the strength of my affection. I will not ask if I am indifferent to you: were I so, this hand which I hold would not have been proffered me."

"No, Frank," answered the damsel, in a low but serene voice; "you are not indifferent to me. I feel honoured and flattered——But those are cold terms; and I will say that I also am happy."

Again did Francis Paton press to his lips the fair hand which he held in his own; then he rose from his knees—the lovers approached the casement—and there for nearly an hour did they stand in sweet discourse, the pauses of which were filled up with the eloquence of their looks. They heard

not the door open: but it did—and the Marquis of Eagledean, accompanied by the Marchioness, remained for a few moments upon the threshold to contemplate that young couple who were respectively such perfect specimens of the beauty of the two sexes.

Angela was seized with confusion when Lord and Lady Eagledean approached: but Frank, enthusiastic with joy, embraced his parents in gratitude for the hint which they had given him, and the opportunity they had afforded him to avow his love,—by both of which, as the reader has seen, he failed not to profit. The Marquis and Marchioness, welcoming Angela as their future daughter-in-law, embraced her affectionately; and it was soon whispered throughout the mansion that the beautiful Miss Deveril was the destined bride of Francis Paton.

On the following day one of the Marquis's carriages bore William and Angela back to London; and when they had taken their departure, Elizabeth Paton said with an arch smile to her brother, "Now, my dear Frank, since through my intercession our dear parents have allowed you to precipitate matters somewhat and confess your love to Angela, I hope to see your spirits cheer up altogether; and instead of taking solitary rambles, that you will have the kindness to ask me to accompany you."

CHAPTER CXXXVI.

MRS. CHESTERFIELD.

It may be necessary to observe, for the benefit of some of our readers, that in the immediate vicinity of Paris stands a charming village known by the name of Auteuil—one portion of which is bordered by the Bois de Boulogne—or anglicising the term, "Boulogne Wood." In this district there are numbers of beautiful villa-residences, the gardens and pleasure-grounds of which are so well stocked with evergreens, that even in the middle of winter they have a gay appearance. There is always sufficient verdure to afford a refreshing spectacle for the eye to repose upon; and the more genial climate of France prolongs the duration of Autumn and keeps back the advance of Winter more than in the British Islands.

It is our present purpose to direct the reader's attention to one of these delightful villas in the neighbourhood we have just described; and although it was now the beginning of November, yet the view from the casements of this residence was pleasing and cheerful. There was a spacious garden attached; and in front, at a short distance, was the Bois de Boulogne. The villa thus stood in a rural seclusion; and if its site and scenery were so agreeable as the cold season approached, the reader may imagine what must be the charms of that spot in the more auspicious periods of the year. The villa belonged to an elderly Frenchman and his wife named Durand—who having saved up some little money by trading pursuits carried on in Paris, retired from business and purchased this little property with the intention of settling down there, and also with the hope of enjoying a serene old age. They had no children, and no near relations; so that when, after a time, they began to feel somewhat dull and lonely in this seclusion, after having spent the greater portion of their existence amidst the gaieties, the bustle, and the excitement of the Parisian capital, they had no one whom they could take to reside with them. Under these circumstances, and having several spare rooms in the villa, they determined to let out these apartments, either to a quiet married couple without children—or else to some single person, male or female, requiring such accommodation. Advertisements to this effect were inserted in some of the Parisian newspapers; and the first applicant whom they brought to the villa, was so pleased with the apartments, the situation of the house, and the elderly couple themselves, that she at once took up her residence there.

This was an English lady, who however spoke the French language with an almost perfect fluency. She gave the name of Mrs. Chesterfield; and stated that her husband held an important situation in India, whither he had recently repaired; but that for certain reasons she herself had not accompanied him, it being understood that she should remain in Europe until the decline of the following year, when she purposed to set off and join him in his oriental home. Mrs. Chesterfield was a lady of great beauty—apparently about two or three-and-twenty years of age—with dark hair and eyes, a delicate olive tint of complexion, and a superb figure. Her manners were sufficiently aristocratic to denote that she had moved in the highest circles—but yet so fascinating and engaging, when she thought fit to render them so, that she at once gained the good opinion of the Durands. On taking the apartments for a term of six months, she paid the entire rent in advance—thus rendering references as to respectability quite unnecessary; and indeed such was her appearance, that her bare word would readily have been taken as the surest guarantee for anything she might advance. She paid by means of a cheque on a Parisian banker, signing the name of *Augusta Chesterfield;* and when she arrived at the villa from the hotel where she had been staying, she brought trunks well filled with every variety of the handsomest and most elegant apparel. She had no maid of her own; and therefore an additional female servant was engaged by Madame Durand to attend especially on the beautiful lodger.

It soon became apparent to the elderly couple that Mrs. Chesterfield was not altogether happy; and the keen eye of Madame Durand, with a woman's power of penetration, also observed that she endeavoured to conceal whatsoever cares were gnawing at her heart. Sometimes, when Madame Durand ascended to Mrs. Chesterfield's apartment to receive orders respecting the dinner or other matters, she noticed that the lady was sitting at the window in a mood of deep abstraction—perhaps with a book resting on her lap, but her fine dark eyes gazing vacantly from the window. Then, on being addressed, she would be startled back into self-possession; but the recovery of her composure was instantaneous—and her countenance would become animated with a smile which contrasted strangely with the mournful reverie whence she had been aroused. She received no visits—appeared to have no acquaintances in Paris—and

during the first few days of her residence at the villa, received but one letter, which was in a beautiful female hand, and bore the English postmark.

It was the same day on which Mrs. Chesterfield received this letter, that after having perused it, she went forth to walk in the Bois de Boulogne. The weather was serene and beautiful for that season of the year; and the sun was shining brightly in a climate where such mists and fogs as those which are familiar to the dwellers in the British capital, are almost entirely unknown. Mrs. Chesterfield was well but unostentatiously dressed: there was elegance without pretension in her garb—every detail of her apparel indicated the refined taste of a well-bred lady, without the slightest desire for gaudy show. Yet it was impossible that a woman of her striking beauty and gorgeous developments of shape could fail to attract attention. It was in the forenoon that she was thus rambling forth; and there were but few persons in the road intersecting the wood where she was walking. She herself was plunged in deep thought,—most probably pondering upon the contents of the letter which she had that morning received; and thus for some time she remained unconscious of having become the object of admiration and interest on the part of a young and very handsome gentleman who was mounted on a superb steed.

There was something distinguished in the appearance of this cavalier. Not only, as just stated, was he remarkably handsome and possessed all the advantages of youth—his age not exceeding that of the lady whom he was admiring—but his demeanour was exceedingly prepossessing; and there was a certain mildness in his look, which without detracting from a proper manliness of mien, bespoke an amiable disposition. He was followed by a groom in a neat and elegant livery, and who bestrode an animal well corresponding with the beauty of the steed which carried his master. It was evident by the way in which this gentleman suddenly reined in his horse on catching the first glimpse of Mrs. Chesterfield's figure, as she was walking in front, that he was at once struck by the admirable symmetry of her shape—a shape which, with an almost Hebe luxuriance, was of perfect proportions. He walked his animal until, having passed her somewhat, he was enabled to obtain a view of her countenance; and the impression made by that face, enhanced the admiration already excited by her figure. He could not immediately take his eyes off her; and she was so deeply absorbed in her own reflections, that she did not notice how attentively he was surveying her. Suddenly smitten with the conviction that his gaze was of a fixity and an ardour that might be construed into rudeness, he reluctantly averted his eyes and quickened the pace of his horse: but he could not for the life of him continue his way with the chance of losing sight of a being who had thus so suddenly taken possession of his heart. He again looked round: still she saw him not: he was enabled therefore to consider her more attentively—and he felt that this lovely unknown had, all unconsciously, become invested with a power over him which he could not possibly shake off. The longer he contemplated her, the more fervid grew his admiration. She appeared faultless in his eyes. With all the straining of hypercriticism—if he were inclined to be thus critical—he could not have wished a single feature to be otherwise than it was, nor a single contour of her shape to be differently modelled. Every one has a particular taste in respect to female beauty: every man has his own *beau ideal* of feminine charms;—and here was a being who in every way, even to the minutest detail, fulfilled that picture of loveliness which the young gentleman had often drawn in his own imagination as the one to be most worshipped and adored.

Still she beheld him not. Again he feared to be considered rude, and even grossly insulting; for she was evidently a well-bred lady—there was nothing in her appearance that could be taken as an encouragement for libertine advances;—and absorbed in thought as she now seemed, it was utterly impossible to perceive in her demeanour the faintest approximation to an overture. But that very pensiveness on her part excited the interest and piqued the curiosity of him who was thus admiring her. Already enamoured of her beauty, he longed to know who she was: he longed likewise to ascertain wherefore she was thus plunged in melancholy thought. He could not therefore hurry away from the spot where she was walking; and yet, if he thus continued reining in his own impatient steed so as not to outstrip her pace, and at the same time keeping his looks so fervently fixed upon her, he would be guilty of a rudeness which was altogether at variance with his sense of good breeding. Reluctantly therefore was he compelled to ride onward; but at a little distance he halted again, and looked back. She had turned—she was retracing her way: the idea of losing sight of her was not to be endured. At any risk he must know more of her: so he turned likewise—and again walking his horse, soon overtook the object of his admiration.

Suddenly she raised her eyes, and beheld his own fixed thus ardently upon her. Her lips, riper and redder than the most luscious of fruit, were slightly apart: he could discern the dazzling brilliancy of her teeth—he saw that she was indeed perfect in every feature, faultlessly fulfilling his own *beau ideal* of feminine beauty. She averted her eyes—it struck him, with a flush of dignified indignation upon her countenance; and she at once turned into a diverging pathway, which could not be pursued by any one on horseback. He reined in his steed to a halt; and sat for a few moments in the saddle irresolute how to act. But promptly making up his mind, he sprang to the ground; and as the groom immediately galloped up, he abandoned his horse to the man's charge,—quickly striking into the same path which the lady had entered.

In a few minutes he was by her side. Mrs. Chesterfield neither looked to the right nor to the left—nor quickened nor slackened her pace—but continued her way with an air as if she were ignorant that she had thus been followed; or else with the modest self-possession of a virtuous woman who chose not to give the slightest encouragement to libertine boldness. The young gentleman longed to address her, but dared not: he passed on—and when a few yards in front, looked back. Mrs. Chesterfield at once turned into another pathway,—so that if he now retraced

his own way and followed her, there would be something unmistakably pointed in the proceeding. For a few moments he again stood irresolute: he thought to himself that this was decidedly no adventure offering him any encouragement to persevere with it;—and yet it seemed as if his whole happiness were at stake, so great was the empire which her charms had within a short half-hour established over his heart. He was however no frivolous-minded young man, such as Lord Saxondale: he possessed a loftier intelligence—and yet he had not the moral power to fling off the thraldom which had thus so suddenly enchained him in its meshes.

With a sort of desperate resolve he pursued the lady: he passed her again—he looked round—but with a gaze of the most respectful admiration; and perceiving that she stopped suddenly, as if sorely offended, and was then about to turn and retrace her own way, he accosted her without farther hesitation.

"For heaven's sake do not be angry, madam!" he said, in a tone of earnest entreaty. "Not for worlds would I give you offence!"

He spoke in the French language, which was his own native tongue; and his looks were full of a deprecating tenderness, as much as to implore that his words and conduct might be favourably interpreted. Mrs. Chesterfield bent the full power of her dark eyes upon him: there was mingled anger and curiosity in that look; and as he thus beheld her close, he saw no need to alter the opinion he had already formed of the dazzling splendour of her beauty.

"If you would not offend me, sir," she answered, after a few moments' pause, "you will at once proceed on your own way and leave me to follow mine:"—and as she also spoke in the French language, it was with that slight foreign accent which proved that France was not her native land.

"My way is yours," returned the young gentleman: "for you lead me by a silken chain from which there is no possibility of self-extrication."

"This, sir," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield, in a dignified manner, "is not the age of romance, and you are not a knight-errant, with a prescriptive privilege to throw yourself at the feet of any lady whom you may encounter."

"No," he quickly responded, rejoiced at having so far succeeded as to hold her in discourse: "but though the age of knight-errantry may have passed away, the admiration which is due to feminine beauty belongs to all time—and love is confined not to a particular century, but is coeval with eternity itself."

A scarcely perceptible smile appeared upon the rich red lips of Mrs. Chesterfield,—not exactly a smile of scorn nor of anger, but one which was evidently called up by the ingenuity of her persevering admirer's repartee; and his heart glowed with a still deeper fervour, in satisfaction at not having experienced a farther and more pointed repulse.

"You are an English lady," he said. "Not only do I judge by your accents that such is the fact, fluently though you speak my own native language,—but England alone of all European countries can produce such a specimen of grand beauty as yourself."

"I do not thank you, sir, for this compliment," answered Mrs. Chesterfield; "because I hate flattery—and moreover you are holding me in conversation against my will. Decide which path you purpose to take: the other direction will be mine."

"Is it possible that you are resolved to view my conduct with such severity?" he exclaimed, still in a tone and manner of earnest entreaty: and so truly handsome did he appear at the moment, that even the most virtuous female heart could not have remained altogether untouched,—especially as there was nothing of the rakish libertine's insolence in his looks; but the admiration he displayed was invested with the profoundest respect. "I have already implored you not to take offence. At least permit me the pleasure of conversing with you for a few minutes longer."

"If for a few minutes, wherefore not for an hour?" demanded the lady, with a slight and scarcely perceptible archness of look: and as her countenance instantaneously became serious again, she added, "Not for an hour—and therefore not even for another moment."

Thus speaking, she turned and pursued her way quickly. The young Frenchman felt bewildered and excited to almost a maddening degree: the brief discourse already holden with her, had rivetted the power of her charms: her voice, rich and full-toned without in the slightest degree transgressing the bounds of feminine harmony, had sunk like a ravishing music into his soul. It was impossible that he could tear himself away: he almost felt as if some slight advantage were already gained; and if he were justified in so thinking, he resolved to follow it up. He was soon by her side again.

"Expend upon me all your indignation, if you will," he said, in a hurried and excited manner; "fling upon me all the lightning of your looks—set me down in your mind as the most audacious of men or the vainest of coxcombs—but enamoured as I have become of your beauty in the space, I may say, of a few brief minutes, I am resolved not to prove altogether indifferent to *you!* No—I will even force you," he added, vehemently, "to accept the homage of my heart!"

Mrs. Chesterfield once more stopped short: her splendid figure was drawn up to its fullest height: a dignified elegance characterized it: the crimson mounted to her cheeks—her nostrils dilated—her bust, already so luxuriant, seemed to expand into a still ampler volume; and her flashing looks were flung upon the audacious young Frenchman. She spoke not a word: but she gazed upon him as if to assure herself that he had indeed been bold enough to address her in that style—and perhaps also to put his courage still farther to the test, and see whether he would quail beneath that Juno-like aspect which she assumed.

"Oh! if you mean to play the goddess," he cried, in a sort of mad enthusiasm, "I will cheerfully——Oh, so cheerfully fall down at your feet in worship and adoration!"

"Do you know, sir," said the lady, with a half-supercilious, half-compassionate smile, "that I begin to think your intellects are really deranged: for there is something ludicrous in this proceeding on your part. If I were reading it in a book, I should smile over it as a monstrously overstrained sketch: now that it is happening positively and

actually before me, I cannot treat it otherwise than by the supposition that its hero must have escaped from a lunatic-asylum."

"Sane in all other respects," responded the young Frenchman, "I may indeed be goaded to madness by the passion with which you have inspired me. Now listen! That very attitude of goddess-like indignation which you just now assumed—that very aspect of ire which, with the mien of the Olympian Queen, you put on—have only exhibited your incomparable charms in a new phase, and rendered me more completely your slave. Aye!" he added, with a sort of fever of exultation, "I could consent to endure taunts—scorn—even the direst outpourings of your wrath, so long as you do but allow me to remain in your presence."

"And pray," demanded Mrs. Chesterfield, "who is the audacious individual who is persecuting me thus?"

"I am the Viscount de Chateauneuf," he responded: "and I may without vanity add that I belong to one of the oldest and wealthiest families of France."

"Most sincerely do I hope," immediately observed Mrs. Chesterfield, "that you have parents who will keep a watchful supervision over you?"

"My parents have long been dead," rejoined the Viscount: "they perished when I was a child."

"But you have guardians—you have relations," continued the lady, "who may take care of you?—for heaven knows that you require their attentive watching."

"I am my own master," he answered: "and no one has the power to exercise the slightest control over me."

"I should not have thus remained in discourse with you," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, "did I not really believe that your intellects were slightly unhinged. But if there be no ground for such compassionate feeling on my part, then for the same reason there exists no apology for your conduct; and I beseech——nay, I command that you leave me without further molestation."

"Oh! madam, reject me not thus!" exclaimed the Viscount. "Yes—I am mad—my intellects are unsettled—have your own way—anything—everything you wish or choose to suspect, so long as you permit me to be near you! I am not one of those vain and presumptuous libertines who fancy that they have merely to fling their looks upon a woman in order to captivate her: but the blaze of your beauty burst as it were upon me with a power that was irresistible. I feel towards you as never to any woman did I feel before—— Would that this were a land of slavery, that I could be your slave!"

"Now, my Lord Viscount de Chateauneuf," said Mrs. Chesterfield, with a coolness which if not actually supercilious, was at least sufficient to damp the ardour and even provoke the irritation of the young nobleman if he really did not love her as passionately as he had proclaimed,—"you must confess that you are carrying the romance of the present proceeding to a point at which it becomes ludicrously unnatural and preposterous. I might—indeed, perhaps I *ought*—to exhibit more anger: but with that impression upon my mind, I really have not the heart to visit your silly presumption with any severer evidence of my displeasure—and hope that you will now at once pursue your own path."

"No, lady. By heaven!" he exclaimed, "if love could be chased out of the heart by bitter words, your's would have had that effect. It is not however so with me. I have suddenly entered into a new state of being: I feel as if I had a certain duty to perform,—a duty towards myself,—a duty for the assurance of my own happiness; and it shall be accomplished! I care not at what sacrifice nor at what risk: it is my destiny—and I will fulfil it. No: I will not leave you! By heaven, you shall not remain indifferent to me! My conduct shall be fraught with a perseverance that will compel you to take it as most serious, and not to stigmatize it as puerile silliness. You may invoke the aid of the law against me—you may consign me to a prison: but you cannot conquer the feelings of my heart. The term for my release must come: and then would I follow you all over the world—I would find you out, wherever your place of concealment—I would tear you away from the midst of your family—from the embrace of father and mother——aye, even from the arms of a husband——By heaven, lady! you shall be mine—and I swear it!"

Mrs. Chesterfield's countenance gradually grew profoundly serious; and then, mingling with that seriousness, was a certain degree of trouble, as the impassioned Frenchman went on speaking. She looked anxiously around as if to see if succour were nigh: but no one appeared—and they were in the depth of the wood.

"And is it a French nobleman—a French gentleman—a man of honour and of chivalrous mind who thus addresses me?" she asked, her frame trembling visibly. "Suppose, sir, that I do really possess a husband who is devoted to me, and who being absent, places the firmest reliance and the fullest trust in the honour and purity of his wife,—would you compromise me with him?"

"Have you not already gleaned sufficient from my words," exclaimed the Viscount, "to be convinced that you are speaking to a man whom excess of passion has goaded to frenzy? and what will not such a desperate man do? Compromise you with your husband! What does a woman require, but the love of a man—a love which is a worship and an adoration? That love shall you have from me. Rest assured that it will far transcend any amount of love with which your husband can regard you. And, Oh! if he be absent—if for a single day—a single hour—he could consent to separate himself from such a being as you, it is that he loves you not with one tithe of the fond ardour that my devotedness would display!"

"And do you seriously reflect, M. de Chateauneuf," asked Mrs. Chesterfield, her dark eyes resting earnestly upon his flushed and excited countenance, "that your words are fraught with a sovereign insult to a virtuous woman? Once more, sir, will you suffer me to depart? I wish for no scene—no exposure—nothing to compromise either of us in the more frequented parts of this resort; and therefore do I counsel you to take one path, and leave me free to choose another. For this reason also I do not abruptly break away from you; because I will not provoke you to hang upon

my footsteps, and pursue me in such a manner as will compel me to resent your conduct. You see, sir, that I speak considerately, and even kindly to you under the circumstances: I am willing to forget what has occurred, if you will only suffer me to pursue my way without farther molestation."

"I have already declared," he answered, "that we shall not part thus. I have sworn that I will compel you to regard me with some other feeling beyond indifference——'

"And therefore," interrupted the lady, "you would inspire me with terror."

"No," he rejoined: "with love!"

There was a pause, during which Mrs. Chesterfield again seemed bewildered and troubled,—a pause, too, during which her impassioned admirer drank in fresh draughts of fervid love. He was literally intoxicated by the feelings wherewith she had inspired him. All this reasoning on her part only maddened him the more fiercely —rendered him the more desperate. He was brought to that point at which he could commit a crime rather than not succeed in winning her whose grand beauty had so completely ensnared his soul. And now the reader will probably bethink himself of that description which we gave in a recent chapter of the varied modes in which young Cupid takes possession of the human heart: for, as in the case of Francis Paton and Angela Deveril, the mischievous god had entered the sacred tabernacle of tender feelings stealthily and gradually—so in the present instance, had he all in a moment stormed the heart of the Viscount de Chateauneuf.

"I feel so exhausted and overcome," said Mrs. Chesterfield, "by the excitement which for the last hour I have gone through, that in mercy I ask you to suffer me to return to my residence."

"Yes—if you permit me to know where that residence is. It cannot be far off," he added, as an idea struck him: "or you would not be on foot in this wood."

"But," she replied, "what guarantee have I against——"

"Molestation on my part?" he ejaculated, finishing the sentence for her. "Give me but a single hope, however faint—however distant: promise that of your own accord you will meet me again: name the hour and the place—and as a man of honour I swear that those with whom you are residing, shall have no cause to suspect that your beauty has won the heart of an admirer who will never be wearied of giving you proofs of his devotedness."

"You place before me, sir," answered the lady, "certain conditions which leave me no alternative. To-morrow at mid-day will I be in this spot: but I conjure you to reflect well in the meantime, whether you are acting wisely and well in respect to yourself—honourably and chivalrously in respect to me. And now, sir, if you follow at a convenient distance, you will see where I reside."

A look of profound gratitude, totally unmingled with overbearing triumph, appeared upon the countenance of the young nobleman: he felt that he had gained a material point—hope was burning in his breast—and with his glances did he thank that splendid woman for not having driven him to despair. She turned and walked in the direction of the Durands' villa: she did not look back—but she knew that the Viscount de Chateauneuf was following at a certain distance. She reached the gate of the enclosure in the midst of which the villa stood; and as she rang the bell, she did glance round for a single moment. The Viscount was amongst the trees—and though visible to her, yet beyond the range of view commanded by the windows. He raised his hat in respectful salutation —tarried there till he saw that she really entered the house—and then plunging deeper into the wood, remained watching in concealment for at least an hour, to assure himself that she did not come forth again. For he thought it just possible that she might have merely called there upon some pretext, so as to rid herself of his importunities. But the hour passed: she did not make her appearance; and through an opening in the trees, he presently caught a glimpse of her as she passed one of the windows of the principal room on the first floor. Then he felt assured that she was really and truly an inmate of that house; and he hastened away with a heart full of exultation.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

THE VISCOUNT DE CHATEAUNEUF.

PUNCTUALLY at noon on the following day, Augusta Chesterfield repaired to the appointed spot. The weather was again exceedingly beautiful and remarkably mild. The sun was shining—and there was a certain degree of warmth in the air which produced the impression of Spring's advent rather than of stern Winter's near approach. Mrs. Chesterfield was dressed with perhaps still more elegance than on the preceding day; and certainly her beauty was of a very superior character. The masses of her raven hair hung in long luxuriant tresses beneath the bewitching Parisian bonnet that she wore: her dress, of rustling glossy silk, fitted tight to her shape,—thus developing in well defined reliefs and in rounded outlines the rich coutours of her form. As the pathway had grass on either side, and was exceedingly narrow —and the herbage might be damp—she raised her dress somewhat, as ladies are wont to do; thus affording a glimpse of the shapely foot and the well-turned ankle. There was a slight flush upon her countenance—the mantling of a carnation hue beneath the delicate olive of her pure skin; and her eyes appeared to swim in a lustrous languor.

The Viscount de Chateauneuf was at the *rendez-vous*—which indeed he had reached half-an-hour before the appointed time; and on this occasion he had come on foot, so as to avoid the possibility of having his actions spied by the groom who had accompanied him on the preceding day. The moment he beheld the object of his adoration approach, he flew towards her, and before she had time to prevent the action—if she had the inclination—he had caught her delicately gloved hand and pressed it in rapture to his lips.

"You have come," he exclaimed, in a tone of fervid exultation! "You have come—you have kept your word—there is hope—and I am happy!"

"Yes—I have come, my lord," she answered, quickly withdrawing her hand, and speaking in a

very serious tone: "but it was with the expectation of finding that you had thought better of your yesterday's folly, and that in order to make amends you would not be here to-day."

"Then you understood me not! you comprehended not the passion with which your charms had inspired me! Oh, believe me when I declare that not for one single moment has your image been absent from my mind. Not once did I close my eyes in slumber last night: I lay thinking of you—I did not wish to sleep—my reverie was delicious. I knew that you would come to-day; I had no doubt of it! I felt that such a love as that which I cherished towards you, could not fail to inspire at least some small amount of compassion—some trifling degree of sympathy—some particle of interest. You must have reflected that a man who offers to devote himself entirely to you—to elevate you in his heart's tabernacle as the idol of his worship—is not one whose love is to be treated with indifference. All this I said to myself; and therefore I knew that you would come."

"And is it possible," asked Mrs. Chesterfield "that you are still in this frame of mind? What am I to do to reason you into a more rational course? Did I not tell you that I was married?"

"And did I not assure you in return, that no husband shall bar me from you? But he is absent—he neglects the treasure that he possesses——"

"Speak not of him thus," interrupted the lady: "he is on his way to India, whither imperious duties summon him."

"To India?" echoed the Viscount, enthusiastic joy lighting up his features, and rendering them so supremely handsome that the lady's countenance flushed with a deeper dye and her eyes swam in a more voluptuous lustre, as she gazed upon him. "To India, say you? Then has he left the arena open for another competitor to carry off the prize! To India?—and he could leave you behind him! Oh, he loves you not!——believe me, he loves you not—while I offer you the devotion of the tenderest heart and the adoration of a whole lifetime!"

The lady gave no answer—but bent down her looks as she walked slowly by the side of the impassioned young Viscount. He gazed upon her—that is to say, as much as he could discern of that gloriously handsome countenance which was thus bent downward: he gazed upon her with rapture and with hope! Then his eyes slowly wandered over the sweeping length of her magnificent shape; and he felt that he could seize her in his arms—he could strain her to his breast—he could cover her lips, her cheeks, and her brow with kisses. But he dared not yet go thus far: and yet he saw that his triumph was assured. For if she intended to reject him altogether, why did she continue silent now? why did she keep her looks bent down? why was she evidently reflecting? Ah! says not the old proverb that the woman who deliberates is lost?—and was she not deliberating at that moment?

"Tell me—tell me," he said, after a long pause, "that I am not altogether indifferent to you."

"I know not how to address you," she answered, in a low murmuring voice, as she gently raised her blushing countenance. "If I beseech you to leave me, you will not; and if I were to fly stealthily away from Paris, you would pursue me. If I invoke the aid of the law—which perhaps is my duty—I nevertheless feel that it would be a too cruel punishment for the love which you proclaim, and which seems to have become your master. In every way, therefore, do I find myself compromised with you. Four-and-twenty hours have elapsed since we parted; you have had leisure to reflect upon what yesterday took place—and yet you are still the same. The strength of your passion is thus shown—I cannot doubt it: and it were to take the highest stand on the pedestal of female pride—or shall I say to fall into the very extreme of female affectation?—if I were to declare that I am neither flattered nor complimented by the tribute of such a love as this."

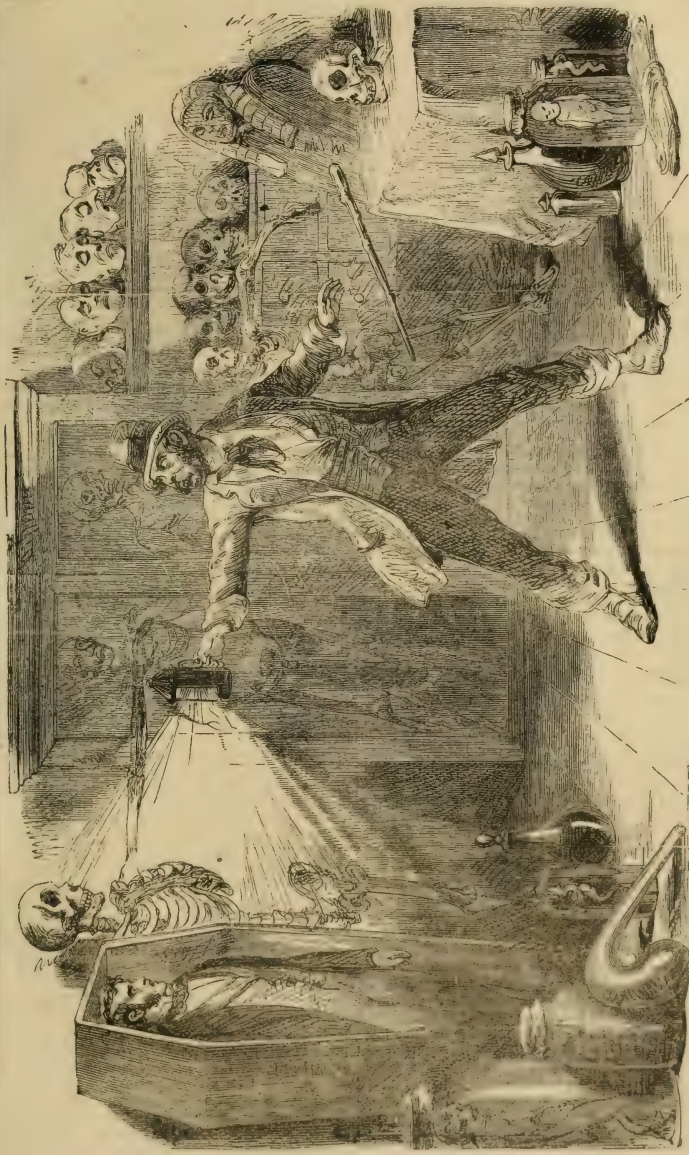
The Viscount de Chateauneuf, literally trembling with the thrill of ecstacy and wild delight which shot through his frame, seized the lady's hand again—pressed it in his own—and this time found that it was not so immediately withdrawn. As he thus pressed it too, he fancied that it quivered somewhat to his touch: he likewise thought that the colour heightened upon her cheeks—and that therefore she herself was not inaccessible to the emotions that throbbed in his own heart. He offered her his arm; and she took it,—her hand however not leaning upon it, but merely resting there light as if it were a feather.

"I will not therefore say," she continued, in the same low murmuring voice as before, "that I am altogether indifferent to the proofs of love which you have offered me: but still I feel as if standing on the brink of a precipice into which one false step will precipitate me, and whence all return is impossible. Now, M. de Chateauneuf, it is no light thing for you to seek the accomplishment of this immense change in my circumstances: nor can I consent, as if it were in a moment of frenzy, to rush blindly and precipitately on such a new phase of existence. Let not our present interview be prolonged: it is for you to regard it as a proof that whatsoever I may promise will be faithfully fulfilled."

"Promise me, therefore," exclaimed the young nobleman, "that to-morrow, at the same hour and the same place, you will meet me. Promise me this—and I am your slave, ready to obey you in all things."

"I promise," answered Mrs. Chesterfield. "And now leave me——Go—let us separate: and above all things, take care how you compromise me at the respectable dwelling where I am residing."

"Compromise you!" ejaculated the Viscount, as if he thought the injunction seemed to throw a damp upon his hopes. "Assuredly I will not seek your presence until I receive your full permission: but if when you come to know me better—if when you catch more of the inspiration of that love which I feel for you,—if *then*, I say, you decide upon abandoning yourself altogether unto me, you will have to dare the opinion of the world—you will become what is called *compromised;* and from this you must not shrink. Do you understand me? It is no mere passing intrigue of gallantry which I propose: I should loathe myself if I were capable of offering you such an insult: I should loathe you if you were capable of accepting it. No:—what I require of you is the utter and total renunciation of all other ties; so that when your husband returns from India, he may not find you ready to receive him with open arms—but he may know the trea-



sure he left behind him, has fallen into the possession of one who is better capable of appreciating it. I have wealth—immense wealth; and it shall be laid at your feet. Of my rank, under circumstances, I cannot make you the sharer: our union cannot be sanctified at the altar;—but the ties which are to bind us, shall be strengthened by the fondest love. And now you understand me; and you promise that to-morrow, at this hour and on this spot, we shall meet again?"

"I promise," was the reply, faintly and murmuringly given.

"And the name of her whom I adore?" said the young nobleman: "what name is it that I may breathe incessantly with the secret voice of my heart until we meet again?"

"Augusta Chesterfield," was the response. "And now that you have my promise, let us separate."

"Farewell, then, for the present, my own worshipped Augusta!"—and M. de Chateauneuf would have strained her to his breast; but she sped away from him in the direction of the Durands' villa.

On this occasion, however, she *did* look back for a moment; and she made a sign of adieu—so that the young nobleman was enabled to congratulate himself that the circumstances of their parting on the present occasion were far more favourable to his hopes than those of the preceding day.

In the afternoon Mrs. Chesterfield took an opportunity to walk with Madame Durand in the garden attached to the villa; and during a pause in the conversation, she observed, as if quite casually, "There are in this neighbourhood several very fine mansions: I presume that they are occupied by the *elite* of your nobility and gentry?"

Madame Durand particularized several; and being of a loquacious disposition, she entered into minute details relative to the reputed incomes and family circumstances of those persons concerning whom she was speaking.

"You behold that beautiful white chateau standing on yonder eminence about a mile distant?" she continued. "It belongs to the Viscount de Chateauneuf—a very wealthy young nobleman, and as handsome as he is rich."

"I think I have heard the name mentioned before," said Mrs. Chesterfield.

"Oh! it is a time-honoured name in the history of the French Aristocracy," proceeded Madame Durand. "True, our Aristocracy is nothing now-a-days: two revolutions and the Charter of 1830 have stricken down the *prestige* of nobility—and no great harm either. Therefore great names are only estimated now if associated with great wealth—which is the case with M. de Chateauneuf. But then," added the landlady, "the riches came by marriage, and were not already in his own family, which was very much impoverished——"

"Then this nobleman," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, stooping down to pick up her pocket-handkerchief,—"this young nobleman of whom you are speaking, is married?"

"Oh, yes!—he has been married for the last two years—and he obtained that beautiful chateau and the annexed estate, together with another chateau and another estate somewhere in the south of France, and an income of five hundred thousand francs* a year, *all* by this matrimonial alliance. I will tell you how it was," continued the garrulous Madame Durand. "There was a very opulent sugar-baker who retired from business some three or four years ago. He was a widower, and had an only child—a daughter named Stephanie. This young lady is exceedingly beautiful—one of the most perfect and angelic creatures you ever saw in your life—highly educated and brilliantly accomplished—of distinguished manners too—and elegant deportment. Now, I must tell you that the sugar-baker was a vulgar, coarse-mannered, repulsive person—very fond of the bottle—and when in his cups, most outrageously insulting to all his guests. The consequence was that, after retiring from business and mingling in the gay circles of fashion for a few months, he was completely shunned; and being turned out of good society, entailed the same penalty upon his hapless and innocent daughter. His ambition was to make for her a splendid match; and thus he suddenly found all his hopes, as he feared, completely frustrated. How was he to get back into society? how to accomplish his aim on Stephanie's behalf One of the few friends who remained to him suggested a means. 'You, my good fellow,' he said to the sugar-baker, 'can give your daughter a fortune: you need not therefore look out for a young nobleman or gentleman who has a fortune likewise; because with such advantages of his own, no such individual would under present circumstances espouse Mademoiselle Stephanie. What you require, therefore, is a young nobleman of brilliant connexions, ancient family, but no wealth; and who will consent to wed your daughter for her riches. Such a son-in-law would be able, by his position, to a certain extent to rule the opinion of society in your favour.'—The sugar-baker readily accepted this advice; the kind friend undertook to find such a nobleman as was wanted; and the impoverished scion of the Chateauneuf family was the fortunate individual thus selected. Accordingly, after a courtship of six weeks, Mademoiselle Stephanie became Viscountess de Chateauneuf. I must however observe that the young nobleman would not consent to any particular formality of marriage-settlements and so forth: he was resolved to have the whole control over whatsoever fortune his wife might bring him; and the sugar-baker was too eager to have the dream of his darling ambition fulfilled, to throw any obstacles in the way. Poor man! when once he was again introduced into society, and tolerated there as the father-in-law of the young and brilliant Viscount de Chateauneuf, he did not long survive the intoxication of his joy; and in a fit of another species of intoxication was suddenly cut off."

"And the young couple," said Mrs. Chesterfield inquiringly,—"are they much attached to each other?"

"Can it be supposed," asked Madame Durand, "that such an alliance should prove a very happy one? The Viscount is a sufficiently amiable young man: but it appears that he has conceived something bordering upon an aversion for his wife. Perhaps it is that his pride is wounded in being constantly reminded by circumstances that he owes all he possesses to the sugar-baker's daughter. Perhaps he feels that he sold himself, as it were, to the selfish ambition of a vulgar upstart: or

* £20,000 sterling, in English money.

perhaps there may be some infirmity of temper on his own part, with which the world is not generally acquainted. Certain it is, however, that with all his other good qualities—and I believe that he has several—he cannot bring himself to pay proper attention to the Viscountess."

"And does she pine at this treatment?" asked Mrs. Chesterfield: "does she resent it? or is she indifferent to it?"

"Indifferent—no!" ejaculated Madame Durand. "She loves and adores her husband: she worships the very ground on which he walks: she is too amiable to comprehend in all its intensity the fulness of his neglect — and much too sweet-tempered to think of resenting his conduct. She studies to make allowances for him: she cannot of course blind herself to the fact that he loves her less than she could wish—but she will not admit to herself that he loves her as little as he does. She attributes to faults or failings on her own side that conduct on his part which really has its origin in his invincible aversion for her. She fancies that she is not beautiful enough—that her manners are not sufficiently engaging—that her accomplishments are inadequate to her position; and she therefore strains and studies to render herself as agreeable as possible. This very effort on her part is distasteful to him: and her want of confidence in herself, appears to the Viscount an additional proof of her unfitness to be his wife. Now, Mrs. Chesterfield," added the loquacious but intelligent Madame Durand, "I think I have furnished you with a pretty tolerable insight into the family and circumstances of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf."

"Have they any children?" inquired the English lady.

"None," was the response. "Perhaps if their union had produced issue, a tie which exists not now, might have bound the husband more closely to the wife."

"Then, I presume," observed Mrs. Chesterfield, with an air of careless indifference, as if she were merely talking for conversation's sake,—"that the Viscount seeks indemnification for domestic unhappiness, in the dissipations of your gay capital?"

"No," replied Madame Durand: "and this is one of the most remarkable phases in his character. So far from being dissipated, he is particularly steady: his chief amusement is riding on horseback—and he may frequently be seen cantering on a splendid steed, and followed by a groom in an elegant livery, through the adjacent wood. Whether he may have a mistress on the sly, I of course cannot say: but at all events he bears the reputation of being as well-conducted a young man in his private life as could possibly exist."

Here the discourse terminated, as a servant came forth to announce that dinner was served up.

On the following day, punctually at noon, Mrs. Chesterfield repaired to the place of appointment. She was now apparelled with a degree of elegance that made her charms truly resplendent. If she had studied her toilet in order to set off the grandeur of her beauty to the utmost advantage, she could not have succeeded more effectually. At the same time there was nothing *outré* or gaudy in her apparel—nothing inconsistent with the most exquisite taste. She seemed to know that she possessed a superb figure; and she had selected a garb the best calculated to display its fine contours. Under the circumstances in which she was keeping the present appointment, it is natural to suppose that there was a certain excitement of the thoughts which gave a heightened animation to the countenance; and when the carnation tinge did rest upon those soft cheeks—and when an additional flood of lustre was poured into those swimming eyes—it appeared impossible that the splendour or brilliancy of her charms could be enhanced.

The Viscount de Chateauneuf was earlier than the appointed hour at the spot; and, as on the preceding day, he had been waiting some little time, when the object of his passion made her appearance. He however had felt assured that she would not disappoint him—that she would keep her word—and that she would come. Handsome as she had appeared to him before, she was now, if possible, handsomer than ever in his eyes; and if she had studiously and deliberately intended to consolidate the empire which she had won over his heart, she certainly might congratulate herself on the fullest success.

"Adorable Augusta!" said the young nobleman, hastening towards her: but to his surprise and dismay, she suddenly assumed a cold and distant look, and held back the hand which he attempted in rapture to seize.

"My lord," she said, "you have deceived me. Frankly and candidly did I explain to you my position—that I was married——"

"Forgive me, Augusta—forgive me!" exclaimed the Viscount, becoming terribly agitated: "but I had not the courage to tell you yesterday that I also am married. On my soul, that avowal would have been conveyed in almost the very first words issuing from my lips on the present occasion!"

"You did wrong thus to deceive me," said Mrs. Chesterfield: "for deception it really was. You should have been candid at once, and not have suffered me to learn by the accident of conversation that such is the case. Do not think for a moment that I have been purposely prying into your affairs. No—heaven forbid! I thought you were all frankness and candour; and I received as gospel whatever fell from your lips."

"And not in one single word have I deceived you!" exclaimed the Viscount with impassioned vehemence. "It is true that I withheld a fact: but I have misrepresented nothing. I gave you the assurance of my fervid and devoted love; and heaven is my witness how truthfully I spoke in all that I thus said. If not, wherefore am I here now? And when I yesterday bade you reflect that there were sacrifices which you would have to make,—think you that I had not in view certain sacrifices on my own side? Think you that if you would have to surrender a husband, I had not already made up my mind to surrender a wife? Did I not expressly and emphatically declare that, although I could place my wealth at your feet, yet that I could not make you the sharer of my rank? And how can this discovery of my marriage constitute any difference between us, inasmuch as even if I were unmarried, you could not accompany me to the altar?"

"Perhaps," responded Augusta Chesterfield, "I

had a certain prospect in view while deliberating whether I should accept your proposals: perhaps I reasoned to myself that if I sacrificed everything for you, a divorce might be obtained between my husband and myself, and that then you would make me your wife. But now, under existing circumstances, the sacrifice you ask me to make is far greater than I regarded it while deeming you unmarried. Therefore," added Mrs. Chesterfield, in a firm voice, and bending upon the Viscount an equally decisive look, "I have met you here now to proclaim, emphatically and peremptorily, that everything is at an end between us. As a man of honour you will never breathe to a living soul that for a single moment I had the weakness to give ear to your words——"

"My God, Augusta, speak not thus!—my own adored Augusta!"—and the Viscount appeared the very image of despair. "Recall those dreadful words!—they are my doom—my death knell! Oh, that the same lips from whence you learnt the secret of my marriage, should have forborne to tell you that it was an unhappy one! Or perhaps that much was likewise explained to you? If not, I declare it now. I never loved her who bears the name of my wife: I never loved before until I beheld you. Oh! mine is a heart that craved an object whereon to bestow all the immensity of that love whereof it is capable; and my imagination had often depicted the *beau ideal* of her whom I could thus love passionately and adoringly. There was a void in this heart of mine to be filled up; and therefore was it that the very first moment my eyes settled upon you, I beheld the idol of my imagination—the *beau ideal* for which I yearned—the object which could alone occupy that place in my heart! Augusta, will you refuse such a love as this? No, you will not—you will not—it is impossible! I see that your looks are melting—their severity is dissipating—you will not drive me to despair!"

"What am I to do?—Oh, what am I to do?" said Mrs. Chesterfield murmuringly, with all the appearance of one who was cruelly bewildered how to act.

"What are you to do?" cried Chateauneuf, seizing both her hands and pressing them in his own: "what are you to do? You are to breathe the word which will confirm my happiness, and thereby give me the means of ensuring your own!"

"Ensuring my own happiness?" said Augusta, in a musing strain. "Oh! it is a tremendous risk that I run in abandoning my husband for the sake of you! Yes—it is a risk which I dare not encounter——there is a reason——"

"And that reason?" ejaculated the Viscount de Chateauneuf, full of the most anxious suspense.

"It is that by remaining faithful to my husband," answered Mrs. Chesterfield, averting her head, "I secure a name for the child which I bear in my bosom: but if I surrender myself into your arms——"

"I will be a father to your child!" responded the Viscount, in a low voice, but replete with a concentrated joy that he was enabled thus to remove the last scruple which appeared to exist in the mind of his adored one.

"Then I am your's," she answered: and she resisted not, when rapturously catching her in his arms, he strained her to his breast.

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

THE ANATOMICAL MUSEUM.

It was midnight—midnight in the dull and gloomy month of November; and neither moon nor star peeped forth from the leaden sky. A drizzling rain was falling,—so that the street-lamps looked as if seen through a mist; and no one was abroad, save those whom duty or necessity, or other urgent circumstances, compelled to remain exposed to the inclement atmosphere. The tall stiff policemen, wrapped in their great coats, wore their oil-skin capes: the daughters of crime stood shivering in doorways; and houseless mendicants endeavoured to draw their rags more closely around them.

The hour of twelve was being proclaimed by the countless tongues of Time throughout the metropolis, as Chiffin the Cannibal entered Conduit Street. His great shaggy coat was buttoned close: his slouching white hat was drawn as much over his countenance as possible; and a dingy red "comforter," encircling his throat, reached up to his very nose. His hands were in his capacious coat-pockets,—the right one clutching the end of his club, which reaching up to his armpit, was thus concealed by the sleeve of the arm itself. He walked quickly—did Mr. Chiffin the Cannibal: for, as the reader may suspect, he was bent on important business.

Turning up a narrow alley which lay between two houses and communicated with a mews, or large stabling-yard, Chiffin proceeded with the unhesitating air of one well acquainted—or, at all events, well instructed in the topography of the spot. Another diverging alley brought him to the back of the particular premises which he sought; and although there was a door in the boundary-wall, he paused not to force it open—but speedily scaled the wall itself. He was now in a garden of tolerably spacious dimensions, considering how thickly that quarter was studded with dwellings: indeed it was the only garden of that size in the entire neighbourhood.

"Old Bob Shakerly assured me there wasn't no dog," muttered Chiffin to himself, as he threaded the garden-walk: but still he kept his club in readiness to deal a ferocious blow, should any such defensive animal rush forward to attack him.

On gaining the rear of the habitation, Chiffin found—as he had been led to expect—that a few steps descended into a sort of area, in which stood the door opening into the kitchen-premises: while over this area, and in the angle which one of the garden-walls formed with the house, there was a narrow ascending flight of about a dozen stone steps leading to another door.

"Old Bob Shakerly said as how this would be the best," again muttered the Cannibal to himself: and he forthwith mounted those steps last alluded to.

It was almost completely dark in the garden,—no lamp being there to shed a ray upon the scene, and no moon nor star, as already stated, appearing

on the face of heaven. But the lynx-eyes of the Cannibal had no difficulty in embracing every feature of the premises; and thus did he proceed without delay or hesitation in the prosecution of his task. Besides, it was evident enough, from his own occasional mutterings, that he had been well tutored by old Bob Shakerly, who though having pocketted scores of Dr. Ferney's guineas, had not scrupled to sell his knowledge of the physician's premises for the bribe which his friend Chiffin had offered him.

The Cannibal's pockets contained all the requisite implements for house-breaking; and in this process he had a most wonderful experience. The door was therefore speedily forced open, and in so noiseless a manner that it could not have been heard by any one a dozen yards off. Chiffin was now inside Dr. Ferney's habitation. He listened —and all was silent. One of his pockets furnished a lantern of the description denominated a "darky" by persons of the Cannibal's fraternity; and this was soon lighted by means of a noiselessly-striking lucifer-match. The Cannibal found himself, as he had been led to expect, in a small passage communicating with a private staircase; and up this staircase he forthwith began to ascend. Every now and then he stopped and listened: but all was still silent. His club was under his arm—one hand carried the lantern—the other, thrust into a pocket, clutched a pistol: so, that should anything happen to menace his safety, this desperate character was fully prepared for such an event.

He gained the second storey: but here he suddenly found himself at fault. Old Shakerly had described to him the arrangements of the house just as he himself had been for years acquainted with them: he had told Chiffin which was the doctor's bed-chamber — where the museum and laboratory were situated—where the servants slept —and where the spare rooms might be searched for; and it was these spare rooms that Chiffin had purposed to visit,—naturally supposing that in one of them Lord Saxondale would be located. He carried in his head a complete map, so to speak, of Dr. Ferney's dwelling, according to old Shakerly's acquaintance therewith. Why then was he at fault? For the simple reason that the alterations which the physician had caused to be made when about to take lunatic-patients, had changed the aspect of the landing on the second floor; so that the Cannibal knew not in what direction to proceed. Where he expected to find doors, there was a partition-wall; and where he looked for a wall, there were doors. In short, the whole arrangements, as described to him by Shakerly, were reversed; and the light of his lantern showed him that these changes were entirely new—therefore unknown to his informant.

What was now to be done? He dared not remain loitering or deliberating there; and if he proceeded at random, he might enter a wrong room and alarm the whole house. But Chiffin was not the man to retreat when money was to be gained; and he resolved to continue his work at a venture. He tried the nearest door: it yielded to his touch—and the light of his lantern showed him a narrow passage. Comparing the position of this passage with the arrangements described to him by Shakerly, he fancied that it must lead to the spare apartments. He accordingly entered it—and tried another door at the extremity. This also proved to be open; and that it was so, must be attributed to an oversight on the part of Dr. Ferney himself—for this door communicated with a suite of apartments which the physician was almost invariably in the habit of keeping carefully closed.

Where was it, then, that the Cannibal thus found himself? In the museum of physiological curiosities, anatomical preparations, and waxen effigies. For a moment, as the light of the lantern revealed these horrors to the Cannibal's gaze, he was seized with the consternation of terror: but this effect was not likely to remain long upon the mind of such a hardened, desperate, care-nothing individual as he;—and the feeling was therefore quickly succeeded by one of curiosity. He stopped short, and looked around him. Here an Egyptian mummy, standing upright in its coffin-like box, met his view through the glass door: there a corpse, embalmed by Ferney's own hand, and wrapped in a shroud, glared upon the Cannibal with its dull glassy eyes. Wherever his looks settled, it was to alight upon some hideous object—some ghastly spectacle—or some monstrous curiosity. He passed on into the adjacent room, impelled by a feeling which he himself could scarcely understand. Here an array of embalmed heads upon a shelf first arrested his vision: then his gaze settled on a skull grinning on a table. He looked around: two waxen effigies, as large as life—representing human shapes afflicted with dire and loathsome diseases —appeared in their glass-fronted cases. Jars, also of transparent glass, containing infant monsters, were in another part of the room; and a colossal skeleton, with one of its fleshless arms extended, next arrested his attention. But, Ah! over what other object did this gigantic atomy appear to be keeping guard?—was that a living man standing in a coffin-like case, and seen through the glass door? or was it some fresh object of horror apparelled in the raiment of a gentleman? Chiffin, still impelled by that same irresistible feeling of curiosity, drew nearer; and holding up his lantern, threw its rays completely upon this object in its receptacle. Dismay and terror seized upon him: a subdued cry of consternation escaped his lips—for it was Ralph Farefield that seemed thus to be gazing forth at the Cannibal!

The club fell from Chiffin's hand; and it was a marvel that the other still retained the lantern: but the handle thereof did his fingers clutch with convulsive force, as if some intuitive spell prevented him from losing the light which showed him that pale countenance on which his dismayed and horrified looks were rivetted. Yes: there stood Ralph Farefield—to all appearance as if he had not been dead a day—the same as Lady Saxondale had seen him when, a few months back, she was introduced to the mysteries of this museum. There he stood—that same Ralph Farefield whom Chiffin had known upwards of nineteen years ago,—dressed, too, in the garb he was accustomed to wear, and with nothing to indicate that he was dead save the wax-like pallor of his countenance and the dull fixed stare of the glassy eyes! There he stood—the corpse of that man who had been one of Chiffin's earliest patrons in

the sphere of crime. No wonder that the recognition should have smitten even that desperate and hardened ruffian with horror and dismay—so unexpected was the spectacle—so ominous appeared to be its presence there! But not long lasted the impression thus made upon the mind of the Cannibal.

"It is but a dead'un," he muttered to himself: and picking up his club, he flung his rapid looks around to assure himself that nothing moved—no one was behind him; for there was still a sort of vague terror, though rapidly dissipating, hovering in his soul.

He now advanced close up to the case which stood by the colossal skeleton of the Russian giant; and he surveyed the corpse of Ralph Farefield with an earnest attention. He forgot, for the moment, the purport of his visit to this house—forgot that time was flying and that he had still much work to do. As he stood gazing on the corpse, it almost seemed as if it were becoming animated with a real life, and that it meant to address him. Its eyes seemed to glare as if vital existence were slowly lighting up within them: the lips appeared to move as if a deep hollow voice were about to come forth from the throat. But these effects were only caused by the oscillating play of the light upon the features; and Chiffin knew that it was so. Still, as he remained rivetted there by a sort of spell, he again felt as if there were something ominous in his thus encountering the dead of other times. It looked as if his former patron in iniquity stood there to warn him that his own career was drawing to an end, and that the time was short ere he would meet that *other* who had gone to the world beyond the grave upwards of nineteen years back!

It was with a sort of desperate effort that the Cannibal tore himself away: but as he reached the door, he could not help looking over his shoulder to assure himself that Ralph Farefield was not following him. On entering the next room—the first of the suite constituting the anatomical museum—Chiffin drew forth a flask from his pocket, and poured a copious draught of brandy down his throat. It appeared to do him good: or, in other words, it revived all the hardihood of the finished ruffian. Now he was once more equal to the task which he had in hand.

Issuing forth from the museum, and threading the passage, the Cannibal was again on the landing—again, too, bewildered which direction to take. But now it suddenly struck him that the altered arrangements of that part of the doctor's dwelling must have been effected for the reception of lunatic patients; and he naturally judged that the apartments assigned to them would look towards the rear of the premises, so that the iron bars at the windows should not afford an unsightly spectacle in the street-front. Guided by this conjecture, Chiffin proceeded to try one of the newly constructed doors. It opened: he peeped in—and at the same instant a man, who was lying in a bed there, started up. The light of the lantern streamed full upon his features; and Chiffin at once saw that it was not the countenance of Lord Saxondale. Quick as thought did the ruffian's club descend upon the head of the man thus startled from his sleep; and the stunning blow arrested the cry of alarm which was about to burst forth from his lips. He sank back insensible upon his pillow: but the experienced eye of Chiffin saw that he was not dead—merely stupified by the blow he had received. Not that the Cannibal would have cared overmuch if the consequences had been of a more fatal character.

The man thus disposed of, was in reality a keeper whom Dr. Ferney had hired in the course of that day, soon after his interview with Lady Saxondale, —this interview, as the reader will recollect, having resulted in the complete triumph of that wily woman over the physician, who had accordingly promised that Lord Saxondale should remain beneath his roof. Immediately upon having dealt the blow which thus effectually stunned the keeper, Chiffin the Cannibal looked into the adjoining room, the intervening door being open. There he beheld young Lord Saxondale, lying fast asleep in the couch.

A grim smile of satisfaction now appeared upon the features of the Cannibal: for he felt assured that his night's work would be crowned with triumph. Throwing back a look to ascertain that the keeper continued in a state of unconsciousness, Chiffin passed into the chamber where Edmund slept; and laying his hand upon the young nobleman's shoulder, he shook him gently. Edmund opened his eyes; and of a surety the countenance of the Cannibal, seen by the light of the lantern, was no very agreeable spectacle to greet the first regards of any individual so waking up. Awful dismay seized upon Lord Saxondale: he was stricken speechless with consternation;—and this was fortunate for the scheme then in progress, inasmuch as everything would have been spoilt if the cry which rose to his very lips had found vent.

"You have nothing to fear, my lord," said Chiffin in a whisper, albeit a hoarse one—and likewise in as reassuring a tone as he could possibly adopt. "I know I am not a very great beauty——"

"But who *are* you?" inquired Edmund, now recovering just a sufficiency of courage to break the seal which horror and dismay had in the first instance set upon his lips: for perhaps it will be as well to remind the reader that when the scene took place some months back at Madge Somers' cottage in the neighbourhood of the Seven Sisters' Road, Lord Saxondale did not behold the Cannibal at all; and therefore his features were now utterly unfamiliar to him.

"Who am I? Why, a friend of your'n," at once responded Chiffin.

"A friend?" echoed Saxondale, recoiling with visible horror; and he trembled likewise with apprehension.

"Well, at least I am employed by some genelmen which is interested in you," resumed the Cannibal: "so don't be frightened—but get up quick—put on your toggery—and let's be off."

"Is this possible?" exclaimed Edmund, joy and hope suddenly springing up in his soul.

"You will see, my lord, it's so possible that a post chaise-and-four is waiting for you in the Square. Jump up, I say, and look sharp."

"But the keeper?"

"He's all right:"—and the Cannibal displayed his club significantly.

"You—you—have not mur—mur—murdered

him?" asked Edmund, with stammering speech: and his countenance was white as a sheet.

"Not I! Don't be afraid, my lord: only a gentle tap on his sconce, just to mend his manners a bit. But you get up; and I will go and stand by the feller, so as to give him another tap if he opens his eyes too soon."

Thus speaking, Chiffin returned into the other room; and Edmund, springing out of bed, proceeded to huddle on his garments. He naturally longed to ask his liberator a thousand questions,—who the gentlemen were to whom he alluded as his employers—whither he was to be taken—how Chiffin himself had got into the house, &c., &c.: but he felt there was no time to pause for such a purpose; and moreover the Cannibal, being at the extremity of the other room, was at too great a distance to be spoken to otherwise than with a certain degree of loudness; and this would be dangerous to the enterprise. On the other hand, Chiffin himself was stationed close by the keeper's couch—one hand grasping the club in readiness to deal another blow, if needful; and his left hand holding the lantern in such a way as to fling its beams on the man's features. But fortunately for the keeper, he remained in a perfect state of unconsciousness until Lord Saxondale had finished dressing: for it was by no means certain that a second blow, if dealt by the Cannibal, would have been so comparatively innocuous as the first.

In less than three minutes Edmund was dressed: never in all his life had he apparelled himself in so short a time; and yet his hands trembled—indeed his entire form quivered—with the most nervous anxiety and suspense.

"Now, my lord, follow me," said Chiffin; "and mind you tread just as if you was walking on eggs. I feel pretty certain this chap"—pointing to the keeper—"will remain quiet for a couple of minutes or so; and that's all the time we shall want."

They issued forth from the chamber: noiselessly they stole along—the private staircase was descended—and they reached the garden. Edmund, who in the meanwhile had continued in almost a frightful state of trembling nervousness, now felt as if he began to breathe the air of freedom; and when the Cannibal helped him to scale the wall and he alighted in the lane outside the barrier, he could scarcely prevent himself from sending forth an exultant cry to celebrate his escape.

"This way, my lord," said Chiffin, who had speedily clambered over the wall after Edmund: and he led him into Hanover Square.

There they perceived a post chaise-and-four waiting at a little distance—and two gentlemen, muffled in cloaks, standing near it.

"It's all right," said the Cannibal, approaching Mr. Lawson and Count de St. Gerard: "here's his lordship."

"To whom am I indebted for so much kind interest?" ejaculated Edmund, rushing forward to seize the hands of the French nobleman and his English friend.

"No matter, my lord—no matter," quickly responded Lawson: "another time, perhaps, you will know——indeed, your wife will give you sufficient explanations: for you must hasten and join her ladyship at Saxondale Castle."

"Ah! my wife?—she has done this? and she is in Lincolnshire?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Lawson, in the same hasty manner as before: "and you are enjoined to proceed with the utmost speed to meet her there. She has had a conversation with your mother, who is in London; and it is of vital consequence to your interests that you should see her ladyship——your wife I mean—without delay."

Thus speaking, Mr. Lawson pushed Saxondale into the post-chaise, which instantaneously drove rapidly off. It will be observed that the Count de St. Gerard took no part in this conversation: nor did he make himself known to the young nobleman. The reader will fully comprehend and appreciate his delicacy of feeling in this respect: but it was not because he thus remained silent and suffered his friend Lawson to be the spokesman, that he was an uninterested witness of the successful result of the Cannibal's enterprise at Dr. Ferney's House.

"Now, my man," said Lawson, turning towards Chiffin the moment the post-chaise had driven away, "you have acquitted yourself so admirably in the business entrusted to you, that you merit a liberal reward; and it shall be forthcoming. We said something about fifty guineas—and I believe you had a few in advance. But this purse contains a hundred: and now we have nothing more to do with each other. Good night to you, Mr. Brown."

"Good night, genelmen—and thank'ee kindly," responded the Cannibal, as he pocketted the heavy purse which sent forth the familiar chink of gold pieces.

He now made the best of his way, by the most secluded route, towards Hammersmith,—purposing to remain at the sign of the *Three Cadgers* until his arrangements for embarkation should be completed. He reached the neighbourhood where the boozing-ken was situated: it was now verging towards three in the morning, but was still quite dark in that November season. He was entering the narrow street at the extremity of which the *Three Cadgers* stood,—when, by the light of a lamp, he suddenly found himself face to face with Tony Wilkins.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

THE TWO MURDERERS.

It was thus that Chiffin the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins met:—thus unexpectedly did they encounter each other. Both stopped short: an ejaculation, not loud, but subdued and gloomy, escaped the lips of each. Then there was a pause; and they stood eyeing each other by the light of that lamp which had mutually revealed their features. Both felt that some terrible crisis was at hand; and yet neither appeared exactly to comprehend what was to be done—nor how whatsoever was to take place, should be commenced. The idea of becoming friends was scarcely possible: the idea of parting without a mortal struggle as enemies, seemed equally impossible. Both the men appeared to comprehend this; and thus for nearly a minute did they stand gazing upon each other.

The reader is aware that Chiffin was of great

strength: Tony Wilkins was many years younger, but was also endowed with considerable muscular power. The Cannibal possessed a degree of brute courage which was equal to any emergency: Tony Wilkins, though less daring and venturous on ordinary occasions, had a spirit which if goaded to desperation, would flame up, investing him with a more than natural energy. Therefore if these two men engaged in a mortal struggle, it would be a terrible one.

As they looked at each other, they were both surprised on a certain account, and for the same reason. Chiffin was surprised to observe that Tony Wilkins was apparelled in the meanest manner, notwithstanding the immense sum he had robbed him of at the boozing-ken in Bethnal Green. On the other hand, Tony Wilkins was surprised that Chiffin, with a reward set upon his head, should go about in his wonted costume, which was rather of a conspicuous character.

"So we meet," said the Cannibal, in a hoarse voice, indicative of a concentrated rage: and his eyes literally glared upon Tony Wilkins.

"Well, it seems like it," answered the latter. "And what then?"

"Why, we are not likely to part again in a hurry, I think," responded Chiffin, "without a mischief being done to one or t'other of us."

"If you choose to begin, you'll find me ready," rejoined Wilkins, with a determined air. "But in course, if we make a row in the street, we shall both on us get took up; and then"—lifting his neck-tie in significant allusion to a halter—"we shall have *this* for the affair in Agar Town."

"I know it," answered the Cannibal: "but whatever happens, you and me must settle old scores. I tell you what: let us go to the *Cadgers*—and whatever's done, shall be done there."

"With all my heart," responded Wilkins. "You keep this side of the street—I'll go t'other——"

"Not a bit of it! We'll go arm-in-arm," interrupted Chiffin, with a diabolical expression—half leer, half grin: "we shall then be certain sure that one or t'other of us can't run away."

"Wery well," said Tony Wilkins; "let it be so."

They linked themselves arm-in-arm—this pair of ruffians who were mortal enemies—this couple of murderers who were bitter foes; and in that manner, without speaking another word, they proceeded along the narrow street till they reached the boozing-ken. All the inmates of the house were at rest: but inasmuch as the patrons and customers of the place were wont to call at all hours, the pot-boy slept just inside the front door, so as to be ready to answer any summons; and a bell was hung immediately over the spot where at night-time he was thus accustomed to make his bed.

The bell was pulled—the door was speedily opened—Chiffin and Tony Wilkins passed in; and the pot-boy closed the door again. It was pitch dark inside the boozing-ken: Chiffin stood on his guard with his pistol and his club—Tony Wilkins with a clasp-knife which he took from his pocket; and though neither could see the defensive precautions thus adopted by the other, yet they both mutually knew that such precautions were taken.

"Get us a light," said Chiffin: and the moment the lucifer, which the pot-boy struck, blazed up, the Cannibal on the one side lowered his club and dropped the pistol into his pocket—while Tony Wilkins on the other hand as quickly closed his clasp-knife and secured it about his person.

Then the two miscreants exchanged a fierce, malignant, cunning look,—as much as to imply that the one knew what the other had been doing, and that they were mutually on their guard against any sudden and treacherous attack. When the pot-boy had lighted a candle, Chiffin took it from him; and ordering some liquor, passed into the tap-room, followed by Wilkins. The pot-boy asked whether they did not mean to go to bed?—to which query the Cannibal replied that they intended to have a little conversation first. The pot-boy supplied them with the liquor ordered; and then crept back again into his own bed near the street-door—where he soon fell asleep. He was too much accustomed to the presence of the queerest and vilest characters in that boozing-ken, to have any curiosity to listen to the conversation which might take place between them.

Chiffin and Tony Wilkins seated themselves on opposite sides of the table on which the candle and liquor stood; and each helped himself with a sort of gloomy coolness to the brandy thus supplied. They drank without the slightest exchange of any of those compliments which under other circumstances would have passed;—and when they set down their glasses again, they eyed each other with a sort of sullen, dogged, menacing defiance.

They both felt that the moment was come when something must be said or done, in order to settle the past or establish the terms on which they were to be for the future.

"Now, don't you think that you was a very pretty feller," asked Chiffin, "to walk off with all the blunt I had been saving up to keep me in my old age?"

"Old age indeed!" ejaculated Tony Wilkins, with a sneering laugh: "you talk as if there wasn't no such a thing as a gibbet, and no such a chap as Jack Ketch."

"Well," responded the Cannibal, "he has got two halters—and when he has strung up one feller, he won't be too tired to do the work for another. But you hav'n't answered my question."

"I will answer it with another," replied Tony. "Don't you think you are an exceeding pretty feller—a reglar out-an'-out proper kind of a chap—to stick to all the swag got by doing the business o. Sol Patch and his wife?"

"It's a lie!" interrupted Chiffin fiercely. "If you have seen a newspaper since, you must have read that after you and me parted I was chased by a lot of chaps, and had to jump into the canal to swim away and save my life. Didn't I meet you at the boozing-ken? and didn't you bolt away like a shot?"

"Well, I thought you was arter playing me a trick," replied Tony; "and so, as I had helped myself to your blunt, in course I stuck to it."

"And much good it seems to have done you," retorted the Cannibal.

"Well, it didn't do me no good—and that's the fact!" answered Wilkins. "I got blazing drunk—fell amongst a set of ragamuffins—and was robbed of every mag."

"That's a lie!" again ejaculated Chiffin. "You've got it about you; and I'll have it—or I'll cut your heart out."

"Two can play at cutting," said Tony: "but it's no lie, Chiffin, I can tell you. I shouldn't be togged as I am if it wasn't true; and I shouldn't have been such a fool either, to come wandering into London again to see what's to be done, arter having tramped about in the country for these weeks past—starving and sleeping under hedges or haystacks——"

"If I thought you was telling me the truth," observed Chiffin, looking very hard in Tony's face, "I think I should perhaps be inclined to forgive you. But I don't believe a syllable of it."

"I tell you what it is, Chiffin,—you may believe it or not, just as you like; and as for your forgiveness, I don't care a rap for it. You led me into that precious business in Agar Town; and I have never knowed what it was to be easy in my mind since. If I go to sleep, it's to dream of gibbets, and hangmen, and sheriffs, and chaplains, and white night-caps, and immense crowds gathered round; and all the while a deep bell seems to be tolling in my ears. That's always when I'm asleep; and when I'm awake and wandering about, I'm always afeard of being suddenly grabbed by anybody I meet. I can't look no one in the face without thinking that he surveys me just as if he was going to say, 'You are Tony Wilkins the murderer.' So you see, Chiffin, there's no thanks to you for leading me into that there business."

"Why, what a puling, sneaking, white-livered, chicken-hearted chap you are!" growled the Cannibal, with a look of contempt. "I couldn't have believed it!—a feller that was always ready for any kind of business——"

"Aye!—but there's a precious deal of difference," interrupted Tony Wilkins bitterly, "betwixt mere prigging and t'other kind of job. I was born and bred to prigging, as one may say:

so it come quite nat'ral, and there was no feeling *here* about it:"—and he laid his hand upon his breast as he thus spoke. "But t'other thing was done all in a minute: it was a sort of plunge from a puddle into the great deep sea. In course *you* can't understand all that I'm saying—'cause why, you're hardened to it. A chap that when he was a mere lad, could kill a feller and eat him, must be up to anything."

"Well, and so I am," responded Chiffin, with another grim smile, as if he took Tony's words as a most flattering compliment and gloried in it. "Why, there was a time when you was as proud as a peacock to be noticed by Mr. Chiffin Esquire; and you would have given one of your eyes to have earned the name of *Cannibal*."

"Yes—and a precious fool I was for letting you lead me away like that," answered Tony Wilkins, with a remorseful bitterness that was most unfeigned. "I only wish I had a chance of altering, and doing myself some good in the world. My thoughts and feelings has drove me to have this wish: but in course I know it can't be done. Besides, it would be useless. I should always see them folks with their throats cut and their brains beat out, rising before me. So you see, it matters little what becomes of me; and if you mean mischief—why, I'm your man, and we'll fight it out in any way you like. Only don't let us make more row than is necessary: let's start off and get into the open fields, if you like, and settle the business there: 'cause why, I don't want to get took up and sent to the Stone Jug."

"Well, Tony, you deserve anything I could do to you," answered Chiffin: "but I really don't see any use in our being bad friends."

"Can we be good 'uns?" asked Wilkins, eyeing the Cannibal suspiciously.

"Why not? Just now I said something about forgiving you: but you wouldn't have that word at no price—and so there's an end of it. Suppose we say we'll let bygones be bygones, have a new start, and work together for the future? Now, Tony," asked Chiffin, "what do you say to that?"

"I say that I'm in such a precious plight, I must do anything to get a crust. Now, do you think, Chiffin, that if I had had twopence or threepence in my pocket to pay for a bed, you would have found me wandering about the streets at this hour? I haven't eaten nothin' since the middle of the day yesterday; and so this drink is getting into my head."

"Well, Tony, shall we be friends?" said the Cannibal.

"With all my heart," was the quick response: "and here's my hand."

The two ruffians accordingly shook hands,—surveying each other with scrutinizing earnestness at the same time, to assure themselves that no treachery lurked beneath this display of reconciliation. It would seem that they were mutually satisfied with the way in which they met each other's looks; and raising their glasses, each nodded in the accustomed style of familiarity.

"Now, my boy," said Chiffin, "you shall have some grub; and I myself am as hungry as a hunter—for I have been out on business all night, and had precious little sleep last night either. It's getting on for four," he added, glancing up at the immense clock in the tap-room; "and I sha'n't go to bed yet awhile. I must eat first. I know where the food is kept; and if you'll lend me the light, I'll go and help ourselves."

Thus speaking, Chiffin took the candle—and left the room. In a few minutes he returned, laden with a dish containing cold meat, a loaf of bread, and half a Dutch cheese. These comestibles he spread upon the table, and bade Tony Wilkins commence an attack thereon. This the younger ruffian was by no means backward in doing; and for the next half-hour there was very little said, both being too busy in satisfying their appetite to indulge in discourse.

"Well now," said Tony Wilkins, when his ravenous hunger was appeased, "what's to be done?—for if you and me is to work together, the sooner we do summut, the better—'cause why, as I said just now, I'm altogether aground."

"You have been unfortunate, then?" observed the Cannibal.

"I can't exactly say how I have managed to live at all," rejoined Wilkins. "It wasn't living—it was downright starving. I never had such a time of it! I raly used to think it was a judgment for that there business——"

"Don't talk no more of it," interrupted the Cannibal: "it makes you quite chicken-hearted. Look here, Tony," he continued, pulling a sovereign out of his pocket and shoving it across the table: "when I say I'm friends with a chap, I mean it; and you sha'n't want a little blunt as long as I've got it to give you."

"Well, you're a good feller arter all," exclaimed Tony, as he took up the money. "I begin to feel summut like myself again."

"Aye—and you *shall* be like yourself again too, very soon," said Chiffin: "for I've got a good thing in hand for to-night; and we'll talk it over presently. Then I'll let you know what my plans are; and we sha'n't be in London many hours."

"I like you again, Chiffin, as much as ever," said Wilkins, on whom the brandy had taken more or less effect.

"Well, I'm getting rather sleepy," said the Cannibal: "and yet I don't know that it's worth while going to bed. Half-past four," he added, with another glance at the clock. "Suppose we lie down on these benches and take a nap for an hour or two: then we shall wake up refreshed—we'll have some precious strong coffee, and talk over different matters."

"With all my heart," answered Wilkins: and he proceeded to lay himself down on one of the seats.

The Cannibal did the same, and in a few minutes appeared to doze off. Then he sent forth a low snoring noise: but the man slept not in reality; and every now and then he slightly opened one of his eyes and looked in the direction where Tony Wilkins lay. He could not however discern whether the latter was asleep, or whether *he* also was pretending to be so, but was keeping on the watch for fear that the reconciliation might not be genuine. The Cannibal accordingly retained his recumbent posture: but not one wink of actual slumber did he take;—and thus the time passed on until the people of the house began to move about soon after seven o'clock. The pot-boy entered to sweep out the tap-room; and the Canniba,

raised himself slowly up with an air of extreme drowsiness. Tony Wilkins, who had really been sleeping, was awakened by the entrance of the pot-boy; and Chiffin was keen enough to perceive that he had actually slumbered.

"He thinks it's all right," said the Cannibal to himself: then speaking aloud, he exclaimed, "Well, Tony, do you feel better for that snooze? Mine has done me a world of good; and I'm as fresh as a lark. Let's go and have a bit of a wash in the yard; and meanwhile they shall get us some breakfast."

Tony Wilkins followed the Cannibal into the little yard at the back of the boozing-ken, and where there was a well, the mouth of which was unprotected by the usual wooden lid, which had recently been broken; and the landlord had neglected to have it repaired.

"Wait till I get a basin and a bit of soap," said the Cannibal, retracing his way into the house for the purpose.

In a few moments he re-appeared, with the objects which he had been to fetch; and he placed them in a window-ledge, telling Wilkins that he might have the first use of them. The unsuspecting Tony was advancing towards the window-ledge, —when, just as he neared the mouth of the well, Chiffin sprang upon him with the force and fury of a tiger, at the same time giving vent to a subdued growl of diabolical savageness. Wilkins—instantaneously nerved with a preterhuman strength, which was inspired by the horrific danger to which he was thus all in a moment exposed—saved himself from being plunged headlong into the well, and made the Cannibal reel a few paces back. But Chiffin relaxed not his hold: *he* also felt himself armed with the power of a thousand: the struggle lasted but for a few brief moments—and the infuriate monster, hurling his miserable victim backward with a terrific impulse, sent him toppling over the brink of the yawning hole.

Whether it were that Tony's head struck against the windlass and thus instantaneously stunned him —or whether it were that he was stupified with awful horror—we know not: certain however it is that no cry escaped his lips. Down he fell—there was a heavy splash—and as Chiffin with gloating looks bent over the opening, he saw that all was still.

CHAPTER CXI.

RAMON DE COLLANTES.

We must now go back for three weeks, in order to relate the first incidents of an episode which will however eventually be found to fit into this portion of our narrative,—inasmuch as its closing circumstances will bring us down to the date already reached: namely, the first week in November. It was therefore in the middle of October, that about a dozen well-armed men, and about half that number of very beautiful women, were grouped upon the bank of one of the streams flowing through the wild valleys of Catalonia. The males wore the half-military, half-mountaineer dress which was peculiar to that district and to their own special avocations: the females were clad in the elegant costume also characteristic of those regions, and which has been before alluded to in the history of Elizabeth Paton.

Spanish feminine beauty for the most part exists more in novels and romances than in reality: at the same time beauty is to be found in Spain as well as elsewhere;—but in no part of that immense country, may female charms be so frequently encountered as in the principality of Catalonia. The women belonging to the band of which we have above spoken, were assuredly the choicest specimens of this feminine loveliness. The picturesque apparel set off to admirable advantage the luxuriant contours of their forms: the fresh air and their own lightness of heart gave the carnation glow of animation to their countenances: their eyes sparkled brightly—and the smiles of their rosy lips displayed, in each individual instance, teeth of the most perfect ivory-whiteness. The men were as fine a set of fellows as ever wore broad-swords at their sides or shouldered muskets: their sun-burnt complexions displayed the rich hues of vigorous health: their long dark hair clustered in natural curls about their heads: their glossy moustaches and beards added to the martial manliness of their looks.

It was in the forenoon of a bright and superb day, in the middle of October, as already stated —when these individuals, male and female, were thus grouped on the bank of the stream. Three or four tents were pitched close by; and in the shade of an overhanging crag, a cauldron was seething, in true gipsy-fashion, above a fire fed with logs of resinous firs. An elderly woman—serving as cook to the band—was watching the culinary process: while the men, stretched in lounging positions, smoked their pipes and chatted with their mistresses, two or three of whom were diligently plying the needle. It was altogether a picturesque spectacle,—that group of Catalans amidst the wildly beautiful scenery of their own native hills!

If their conversation were listened to, it would have been found to run as follows:—

"I would give much to know what occupies your thoughts, Ramon," said one of the young females, gaily and merrily addressing herself to the chief of the band,—who, amongst those fine men, was decidedly the finest—the handsomest in features and the tallest in stature: while his age did not exceed six-and-twenty.

"You shall know my thoughts, pretty one," responded Ramon. "I was envying Gonzalez the possession of such a sweet mistress as yourself—and wondering how soon accident or fortune would furnish me with another to supply the place of her who fled three months back."

"Surely the redoubtable Ramon de Collantes cannot long be at a loss for a lovely one as his partner?" answered the same female who had before spoken. "He has but to make an incursion into some hamlet and carry off her who pleases his fancy best."

"Yes—this might be done," rejoined Ramon: "and *has* been done before," he added, with a smile. "But what has been the result? We have made enemies of those villagers whom it is our interest to keep as friends. No—it is not by such means that I must look to find a suitable partner of my fortunes."

"Then what project have you in your head?"

inquired Gonzalez, now joining in the discourse which his mistress had commenced: "for it is evident that you are revolving something in your thoughts."

"Right!" exclaimed Ramon de Collantes. "I have determined that the first lovely damsel whom we may intercept travelling by coach or chaise, shall become mine—no matter how high her degree, nor what amount may be offered for her deliverance. Now, friends, will you make this concession to your chief?—will you pledge yourselves to forego the prospect of sharing a large sum for the ransom of such female, so that my desire may be fulfilled?"

"Agreed!" was the general cry on the part of all the male members of the band: while the females expressed their approbation with their arch looks and their smiling lips.

Scarcely was this singular convention thus settled, when Ramon de Collantes, suddenly starting up, pointed to an eminence on the summit of which stood a knot of trees, and whence a survey might be taken of all the circumjacent district for several miles. From a bough of one of those trees a small flag was seen to wave; and as the chief of the band pointed towards it, his comrades at once appeared to understand its meaning. Snatching up their weapons, which lay scattered on the ground, they were in readiness to obey whatsoever orders might be given: but all eyes were kept fixed on the knot of trees on the summit of the eminence. The little flag disappeared; and from the midst of the trees an individual came forth,—hastening down the somewhat precipitate slope, so as to join his comrades. He was apparelled and armed in the same style as themselves—and had evidently been on the look-out from the spot where he had hitherto remained concealed.

"What tidings?" demanded Ramon, when the watcher was near enough to be thus questioned.

"A post-chaise approaching along the road!" was the quick response.

"From which direction comes it?"

"From the north," was the answer. "It is doubtless bound to Barcelona."

"Then march, comrades!" exclaimed Ramon: and placing himself at their head, he led them quickly away from the spot.

Those to whom the females belonged, waved their hands in token of temporary farewell; and the fair ones themselves wished them success in their present enterprise. In a few minutes the band was beyond the view of the females; and turning into a narrow gorge, from which one side of the eminence rose abruptly, they pursued their way for about ten minutes, until they reached a grove at the farther extremity of the chasm, and which concealed as well as separated it from the main road. The grove was quickly threaded; and at the very instant that the banditti—for such they were—reached the road, the post-chaise, drawn by mules, was lumbering slowly past. The drivers offered not any resistance; and as the sole occupant of the vehicle was a female, there was no need to use violence—much less was there any reason for a conflict. Ramon de Collantes,—who had been chosen chief of the band as much on account of his proficiency in various languages, as for his valour and martial experience,—at once addressed the affrighted lady in the French tongue: for he saw that she was not a Spanish woman;—and he bade her have no fears for her life. Then he threw a rapidly significant glance around upon his comrades, as much as to imply that accident had just sent him the object of those very wishes which he had so recently been expressing. The lady,—who was indeed remarkably handsome, though evidently somewhat careworn, and now paler still with terror,—did not reply in the French tongue: but in a few broken sentences uttered in English, she besought the bandit-captain to let her proceed on her journey, as her object was of life and death importance.

"Ah! madam, you are English, I perceive," said Ramon de Collantes, now speaking in the traveller's own native tongue: "and if Dame Fortune had intended to confer upon me some special evidence of her favour, she could not have chosen a better mode: for I love and adore you beautiful English ladies!"

The fair traveller appeared much alarmed at the libertine flippancy of the chieftain's words,—accompanied, as they were, by looks of gloating desire wandering over her face and form, as she sat in the chaise. She evidently apprehended the very worst at his hands: but being a woman of naturally strong mind, she subdued her terrors as well as she was able, and addressed him in these terms:—

"I have gold in my purse—and you perceive that I have some little jewellery about my person. Take all these! My trunk contains but some necessary changes of apparel: take them also if you will—but I beseech you to suffer me to proceed on my route! Oh, senor!" she added, a flood of tears suddenly gushing forth from her fine eyes; "you know not how important it is to me to reach Barcelona with the least possible delay!"

"No doubt of it, madam," answered Ramon: "every traveller, whether male or female, tells us precisely the same story. In the present instance it is not your gold nor your jewellery which we will lay hands upon: as for your trunk, one of my men shall take charge of it for you:—but it is absolutely necessary that you should alight and accompany us elsewhere."

Again did an expression of acute alarm appear upon the lady's countenance; and joining her hands in an earnest manner, she said in a voice of corresponding entreaty, "Once more do I beseech you that I may be suffered to proceed! There is a person, dearer to me than life, in sore trouble—on whose behalf I have undertaken this long, long journey——"

"Madam," interrupted Ramon de Collantes, "it is somewhat inconvenient for us to stand bandying words upon the public highway: I therefore request that you lose no time in accompanying us whither we shall lead."

"Good heavens, what a frightful calamity!" she exclaimed, all the remnants of her fortitude appearing to abandon her, and her countenance becoming expressive of a mingling anguish and despair.

"I am grieved, madam, to distress you," rejoined Raymond: "but it cannot be otherwise. You must come!"

"No—you may kill me first!" ejaculated the fair traveller: "you must drag me hence by force——"

"Which I shall assuredly do," responded the bandit-chief, in a decisive tone. "Come, madam! You would do well to alight of your own free will: it is simply absurd for you to offer resistance against a dozen strong men."

"One word more!" cried the afflicted stranger, now sinking upon her knees inside the vehicle, at the open door of which Ramon stood thus parleying with her. "Have you any being on earth who is dear to you? If so, by the name of such loved being, I adjure you to have mercy upon *me!* Again I declare that there is one whom I love more dearly than life, now the inmate of a gaol—perhaps doomed to die—and if I hasten not to console him——"

"Madam, it goes to my heart," interrupted Ramon, "to be compelled to reject your prayer: but it cannot be avoided. I am resolute—I am determined—you must come with us."

"Then may God help me!" said the unhappy stranger, covering her face with her hands and bursting into another torrent of tears.

One of the men, on a signal from Ramon de Collantes, shouldered the trunk,—while he himself, throwing his arms round the fair traveller's waist, was about to drag her forth from the chaise,—when suddenly regaining her presence of mind, she said with mingled dignity and indignation, "Touch me not, senor! If I must accompany you, I will at least escape as much outrage as by my own conduct I may be enabled to avoid."

With these words she descended from the vehicle: but the moment her feet touched the road, she again bent a look full of the most earnest supplication upon the bandit-chief,—saying, "I had heard much of the chivalrous magnanimity of Spaniards—Oh! let not my faith therein be destroyed now!"

Even in the depth of her affliction, she appeared so exceedingly handsome—with her dark blue eyes, her vermilion lips, her beautiful teeth, and the luxuriant ringlets of dark brown which clustered on either side of her countenance—that Ramon de Collantes was ravished with her charms. Then too her form was so fine,—her stature so tall, her shape so richly and yet so symmetrically modelled,—that the bandit-chief thought he could not obtain for himself a more fitting mistress; and though not entirely without generous sentiments, he could not possibly bring himself to renounce the splendid creature whom accident had thus thrown in his way.

"Madam," he said, again assuming a resolute look, "you must accompany us!"

For an instant the afflicted fair one glanced rapidly around, as if in the last wild hope of observing some succour near: but that was scarcely to be expected in the mountainous regions of Catalonia. She would have appealed to the muleteers for aid—only that she now beheld them in friendly discourse with three or four of the banditti, and accepting drams from the flasks of these lawless individuals. All hope died within her: and in order to avoid outrage, she motioned that she was ready to accompany the inexorable chief.

He led the way through the grove, back into the gorge,—his men following at a little distance, and one of them bearing the trunk. As the party walked along, the fair traveller again used all her eloquence to move Collantes to mercy: but he still proved resolute in his purpose. Now that he had still more leisure than even at first to contemplate her, he saw that she must be about four or five-and-twenty; and though not perhaps a lady in the strict meaning of the term, yet of genteel appearance, good manners, and graceful bearing. She was well-dressed; and altogether of an appearance full well calculated to make an impression upon the heart of Ramon de Collantes. Her voice was of flute-like harmony—rich-toned without being masculine; and when modulated to the accents of passionate entreaty, it had something that ravished rather than moved the soul of the bandit.

"No, fair lady," he said; "it is impossible I can accede to your prayer. With me and my band must you remain: but you may be assured of worthy treatment. May I ask whether it be a lover, a husband, or a brother, whom you were on your way to see at Barcelona?"

This allusion to the object of the fair traveller's journey, threw her into a fresh paroxysm of grief,—so that she threw herself down on the slope of the gorge; and again covering her face with her hands, gave way to an outburst of woe so deep, so anguished, that it well nigh moved the heart of Ramon to compassion. But as his eyes slowly wandered over the fine symmetry of her form, he again felt how impossible it was to surrender the prize thus thrown in his way;—and moreover, if he himself were induced to do so, he knew that he should only incur the ridicule of his comrades. Having some tolerable amount of experience in respect to the female heart, he thought it better to permit that gush of affliction to expend itself ere he addressed her again;—and thus, for some minutes, there was a halt at that spot. None of his companions could speak a syllable of English: they therefore understood not what had been passing between himself and her;—but they of course judged that she entreated him to grant her freedom—and that he refused. By their looks they encouraged him to persevere: while they likewise congratulated him, in a similarly significant manner, on the prize which he had obtained.

"For what am I destined? what is to be my doom?" she suddenly demanded, as she sprang up to her feet, her cheeks burning with indignation which her last thoughts had evidently inspired. "If you think to bend me to your vile purpose, you will be disappointed! I will die sooner! Yes—there is one whom I love, and who is in a dungeon——Perhaps his life will be forfeited to the laws of your country——and ye are not men—ye are monsters in human shape, if ye hold me back from the accomplishment of my sacred object! Oh! once again do I conjure you, senor—suffer me to depart! Take all I possess—tell me what farther ransom you require, and it shall be paid——honourably and duly paid—I swear that it shall!—even though my parents beggar themselves to raise the sum which you may demand!"

Whether in the moments of her indignation, or in those of her pathetic entreaty, she appeared so handsome in the eyes of Ramon de Collantes, that he was more than ever determined to keep possession of her. She read this decision in his looks; and suddenly becoming quite calm,—yet it was the calmness of desperation,—she said in a low deep voice, "Tell me, senor, for what am I destined?"

"To be my bride," responded the bandit-chief.

"Your bride?" she ejaculated. "And where is the priest who will join our hands?"—these last words being spoken with a sort of bitter irony which arose from desperation itself.

"By the Holy Virgin, lady," exclaimed Collantes, "it is a comical question that you put! Soothly speaking, however, I must confess that there is no chaplain attached to my band; and therefore we must be content with the marriage festival, without the religious rites. But in me will you have a brave, a fond, and an indulgent partner. We live a happy life: the whole range of the wild Catalan mountains and their picturesque valleys is our own: we pay neither tax nor tribute: the purses of travellers furnish our revenues. Sometimes we dwell in tents in truly patriarchal style: at others we seek our baronial tower. We dance—we sing—we eat and drink of the best: we have no cares. Such is the life which you have now to embrace;—and in truth it is not a destiny which need wring tears from those bright eyes of your's."

"I have listened with attention," responded the fair traveller,—pale with that same desperate calmness which she still maintained,—"because I would know every detail and minute particular of the doom which you purpose to be mine. But it shall not be! You see before you a woman who, if she have hitherto displayed in your presence the weakness of her sex, will afford you proof of its strength. Heartless robber, I will not be your bride!—soulless and implacable brigand, you shall not triumph over me! It shall be a struggle until the very death between you and me, if you dare attempt coercion or outrage! Around us there are precipices, a leap from any one of which is certain death: or in these wilds there are waters, flowing rapid and deep—and they shall engulf me sooner than I will abandon myself to your arms! Now, as you have given me your decision, I offer you mine; and if you seek to make me the victim of your persecution, it will not be a triumph which you accomplish—but a murder which you perpetrate!"

"Beautiful lady," exclaimed the bandit-chief, scorn wreathing his moustached lip, "in every respect are you fitted to become my bride. It is a woman of spirit, such as you, that I have sought; and again I repeat that Dame Fortune has favoured me this day. Have the kindness to accompany us yet a little farther; and you will find charming females to welcome you amongst them."

The fair stranger said not another word—but moved forward, the bandit-captain walking by her side. No doubt she was resolute in her purpose of seeking death, should the moment come when she must either adopt that alternative or else retain life at the price of her honour:—and perhaps she was not yet without the hope of either bending the hitherto inflexible brigand to compassion, or else of discovering amidst the chapter of accidents some opportunity of escape. As he watched her countenance, he saw that he indeed had to do with a female of strong mind.

In a few moments the encampment was reached; and the Catalan women, gathering around the new-comer, endeavoured to make her comprehend by signs—when they found she understood not their language—how welcome she was. Then too, their dark eyes flung congratulatory looks upon Ramon de Collantes, who had thus succeeded in obtaining the gratification of those wishes he had this very forenoon been expressing. As for the fair stranger herself, she received the women's attentions with a sort of distant courtesy,—as if she did not choose to offend them outright, nor yet to show the least evidence of being reconciled to her fate. In this latter respect it was useless to dissimulate,—inasmuch as by no sudden change in her manner towards Ramon de Collantes, could she possibly hope to deceive him in so short a time with regard to her feelings, or throw him off his guard.

The contents of the cauldron were emptied into vessels ready for their reception: other articles of food, accompanied by bottles and jars of wines and strong liquors, were produced; and the banquet was spread upon the grass. Meanwhile the captive stranger had sat down on the trunk of a felled tree; and as she contemplated the tents, the females, the arrangements for the repast, and the aspect of the brigands themselves, she began to associate all these appearances with some circumstances which the present adventure itself had brought back to her memory.

"Are there many such bands as you 's in the mountains of Catalonia?" she asked, addressing herself to Ramon de Collantes.

"There are several such bands," he responded, evidently well pleased that she should thus of her own accord have renewed the conversation.

The lady remained absorbed in thought for a few moments—and then said, "I presume, by the air of authority which you wear, that you are the acknowledged chief?"

"I think, lady," he responded, "that I have already given you to understand such to be the case."

"How long have you been with this band? how long have you acted as its chief?"

"I have been with the band for some eight years," was the rejoinder. "You may therefore judge, lady, that I was only a stripling when I joined it. As for the captaincy, I have held the post about five years."

"And are the captains of the various bands generally known to each other?" was the fair traveller's next question.

"For the most part," replied Ramon, surprised at these queries: for he more than suspected that they were not put through mere idle curiosity, but that the stranger had some ulterior object in view.

"It must occasionally happen," she continued, "that there are names amongst you which acquire the potency of spells from being associated with daring deeds and generous actions. What if I were enabled to mention some such name as this?—what if I were to tell you that I have a slight acquaintance with one who a few years back commanded a band in these mountains—it might even have been your own—and that were he here now, I feel convinced he would use his influence on my behalf? If such a name pass my lips, I say, would it induce you to have compassion upon me?"

While the fair stranger was thus speaking, Ramon de Collantes contemplated her with an increasing degree of blended interest and curiosity.

It naturally surprised him that an English female whom accident had thus placed in his power, should allude to an acquaintance with any former bandit-chief such as he himself now was: and he knew not at the instant how to reply. While he was still hesitating, one of his comrades suddenly gave vent to an ejaculation; and starting to his feet, grasped his musket. All eyes were at that instant turned in the same direction towards which the brigand was looking: and they beheld a person, evidently dressed as a gentleman, approaching from near the entrance of the gorge. Perceiving that he was unattended, and that no followers made their appearance, the fire-arms which in the first moment had been caught up, were deposited on the ground again,—all save that of Ramon himself, who retained his musket as he advanced a few paces to meet this new-comer, at the same time significantly nodding to his men to keep a sharp look-out upon the fair captive and anticipate any attempt which she might make with respect to an escape.

But strange indeed was the expression which rapidly lighted up her handsome countenance with blending joy and amazement, as that new-comer drew near. Anxious uncertainty speedily changed nto positive conviction: for she saw that she was not wrong—that the individual who was advancing, was indeed he whom she had conjectured at the first glimpse of his form and features;—and springing from her seat, she cried in a tone of thrilling exultation, "Count Christoval!"

"Christoval!" echoed every voice, as every one likewise started up again: and there was a general rush towards Don Diego—for he himself this new-comer proved to be.

But the instant his eyes settled upon the countenance of the fair captive, he stopped short with as much amazement as was depicted on her own features; and he exclaimed, "Good heavens, Miss Marshall! is it you?"

CHAPTER CXLI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

Yes—it was indeed Don Diego de Christoval who thus made his appearance. This too was the very band he had once commanded;—though necessarily, during the interval of about five years since he resigned his post, there had been changes as to a few individuals, wrought by violent death on the one hand and by fresh membership on the other. But six or seven males and two or three of the females were still the same whom Don Diego had known and who knew him. To all the rest was his name familiar as a loved and an honoured one; and thus was it that the moment it was mentioned, there was a general rush, prompted by enthusiastic feelings, towards him.

It was now the turn of Ramon de Collantes and all the members of the band, male and female, to be astonished at the recognition which took place between Don Diego Christoval and the captive lady, as the latter flew towards the former for protection. The Spanish nobleman shook her kindly by the hand: he could not forget that it was through her, on his arrival in England ten weeks back, he had obtained a clue to the discovery of Elizabeth Paton's residence; and moreover he instantaneously knew by the manner in which she bounded towards him, that she was the captive Englishwoman whom he had expected to find with the band. He was aware that his influence would suffice to effect her liberation; and he was well pleased at having the opportunity of rendering her a service.

We will pause for a moment to explain how it happened that the Count thus made his appearance upon the scene. As the reader is aware, he had left England soon after he was formally accepted as Elizabeth Paton's suitor—to settle some affairs in the Spanish capital, and procure such documents as would convince the Marquis of Eagledean he was the wealthy individual he represented himself to be. Being desirous to get back again with the least possible delay to England, so as to enjoy the society of his well-beloved Elizabeth,—he brought his business at Madrid to a speedy termination, and set off in his travelling-carriage on his return. Scarcely had the banditti quitted the spot from which they bore off Kate Marshall, when the equipage of Count Christoval dashed up. From the muleteers he learnt an account of what had taken place; and though they were unable to tell him the name of the Englishwoman whose abduction had thus been forcibly effected, they nevertheless made him aware that she was in a state of the most cruel tribulation. The muleteers were well acquainted with the band led by Ramon de Collantes; and from the information they gave, Don Diego thus discovered that it was the very same which he himself had once commanded. Anxious to perform an act of generosity, he ordered his equipage to await his return; and judging from his topographical knowledge, that the band would be encamped at the extremity of the gorge, he proceeded in that direction,—making his appearance under the circumstances already described.

When the first greetings had taken place between himself and the lawless tribe, he made a rapid sign for Kate Marshall to retire to a little distance, while he spoke aside to the bandit captain. Ramon de Collantes revered his late chief with truly enthusiastic devotion; and it therefore required but little suasion on Don Diego's part to induce him to consent to restore Kate Marshall to freedom. The reader can be at no loss to comprehend that it was the name of Don Diego Christoval which Kate was about to pronounce, in the hope that it would have a certain effect in her favour upon Collantes,—at the very instant when the nobleman himself so timeously made his appearance.

The conference between Christoval and Collantes lasted but a few minutes; and when it was over, the former drew forth a pocket-book containing a number of bank-notes,—a large portion of which he insisted that Ramon should accept as the ransom money for Kate Marshall and to be shared amongst the band. Collantes at first positively refused to receive the bounty of his former chief; but Don Diego insisted;—and when Ramon made known to his followers the amount thereof, they once more surrounded the liberal donor, pouring forth their heartfelt gratitude.

In a few hasty words Don Diego informed Kate

Marshall that she was free—for which announcement she proffered the sincerest thanks and exhibited the liveliest joy. Christoval assured her that her post-chaise was still waiting in the road,—adding, "We must stay a few minutes to partake of refreshments with these people; or they will consider me churlish and unfriendly—and for the sake of old associations I am unwilling to earn their displeasure. Besides, you perceive, Miss Marshall, how advantageous it may be under certain circumstances to wield an influence over these wild Catalonian bands. Tarry you therefore until I take my departure; and I will escort you back to your vehicle."

Kate could not of course refuse; and Ramon de Collantes, now accosting her, expressed a hope that she would not bear him any ill will on account of his conduct towards her. She was in too good a humour at having regained her freedom, to give an unfavourable response; and she proffered him her hand as a proof that all was forgiven. The entire party then sat down to the banquet; and at the expiration of half-an-hour, Don Diego Christoval took his leave of his former friends, Miss Marshall accompanying him.

"And now, might I ask," he said, as he conducted her through the gorge, "how it is that I find you a traveller in my native land? Perhaps I may be of some service to you: for I presume it must be more on business than on pleasure that you are journeying thus alone?"

"Ah! my lord," responded Kate, a sudden gleam of hope lighting up her handsome features, which had become clouded as Christoval questioned her relative to her object in visting Spain,—"I am certain you could assist me! Your rank—your influence—your connexions, might be used for the best and kindest of purposes, and to save my happiness from becoming a total wreck!"

"Rest assured, Miss Marshall," responded Christoval, "that if I can thus forward your aims, I shall be truly delighted. But pray explain the peculiar circumstances to which you thus allude."

"I must inform your lordship," answered Kate, bending down her eyes, while a blush mantled upon her countenance,—"that I am engaged to be married to as gallant a sailor as ever dared the perils of the ocean. And a handsome man, too,—a generous and kind-hearted one,—is Edward Russell. He is the owner of a small trading-vessel, and commands it as its captain. By several voyages up the Mediterranean he has acquired some little property; and when he set out upon this present voyage, it was understood it was to be his last, provided success should still attend his ventures. It appears that poor Ned, anxious by a bold stroke to realize a considerable profit ere settling down in married life, freighted his vessel with a quantity of those English goods for which there is always a considerable contraband trade on the coast of Catalonia. It was in the middle of the night that he endeavoured to land his cargo about ten miles north of Barcelona: but it would appear that the revenue-officers had obtained an intimation of the design—for Russell and his crew were attacked while landing on the Spanish coast. They made a desperate defence—several of the Spanish officers were killed—but my unfortunate lover was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner; while his men managed to reach the boat, push it off, and effect their escape to the vessel. The vessel itself got away after being chased by some Spanish cruizers; and poor Ned Russell was conducted a prisoner to Barcelona. There he lies in a dungeon! His trial will shortly come on——Alas! my lord, I dare not even allude to the probable result——or I should rather say the result that is *inevitable*, unless you will kindly interest yourself on our behalf. Yes—*our* behalf," added Kate, weeping; "because I feel that the death of *him* would be the death of *me*——And, oh! such a death—it is madness to think of it!"

"And you have journeyed all the way from England to see your lover?" said Don Diego, gazing with admiration upon the heroic young woman.

"The moment he was plunged into the gaol at Barcelona," responded Kate, "he wrote me a letter, breaking as delicately as he could the dreadful intelligence: for poor Ned feared that he should never see me more. And yet though in that letter he asked me not to come to him, his heart must have told him that I should do so——Yes, I should have come, were the distance even ten thousand times as great! he knows it, and expects me—I am sure he does!"

"Magnanimous young woman!" exclaimed the Count; "you shall have whatsoever little assistance I may be enabled to render you. But this, I fear," he added gloomily, "will scarcely avail under the peculiar circumstances of the present case: for as you tell me, there has been a conflict—blood was shed—lives were lost——"

"But Ned Russell's broad-sword slew not one of those unfortunate men!" Miss Marshall hastened to observe. "His weapon was drawn only in self-defence: he parried blows, but dealt none. His men took those lives that were lost——"

"This may be a consolation for *him* and for *you*, Miss Marshall," observed the Count; "but in the eye of the law it will scarcely be deemed a palliative of the offence, inasmuch as Captain Russell was the leader of those men who took these lives. However, the best that I can do shall be done."

"And my eternal gratitude is your lordship's due," answered Kate, with fervid enthusiasm.

"Surely, Miss Marshall," observed Don Diego, "you had some other hope of being enabled to interest yourself on behalf of your intended husband? If so, leave no stone unturned——"

"I had indeed some slight hope in a certain quarter," responded Kate. "The Marquis of Villebelle, the French *Chargé d'affaires*, at th Court of Madrid, is under some obligation to me on account of a certain matter wherein I was enabled a few months back to render him a little assistance——"

"The Marquis of Villebelle?" ejaculated Don Diego, to whose ear the name was well known, inasmuch as Elizabeth Paton had told him all her past history.

"Yes, my lord—it is he," rejoined Kate, "on whom I did somewhat reckon for succour in this dreadful dilemma. I know wherefore the name has thus startled you——"

"By all means," said the Count, "fail not to communicate with the Marquis—or see him—as soon as possible. Wherefore should you proceed first of all to Barcelona? wherefore not repair straight to Madrid?"

KATE MARSHALL

"I was bewildered, my lord—I knew not how to act," answered Kate, weeping. "Methought that the best course would be to visit poor Russell first of all—to ascertain precisely how matters stood ——for I am even in ignorance whether the trial has yet taken place or not——"

"Ah! if so—" interrupted Christoval: but he suddenly stopped short, fearing to shock the afflicted young woman; for what he was about to say was that the execution of the sentence would speedily follow its pronunciation.

"I know what your lordship means," murmured Kate. "What would you advise me to do?—shall I proceed to Barcelona? or shall I pursue the road to Madrid?"

Don Diego Christoval reflected for a few minutes; and then he said, "I have made up my mind what course I will pursue in the matter, and the line of conduct I shall counsel you to adopt. I will myself repair to Barcelona——"

"You, my lord?" cried Kate, with enthusiastic gratitude. "Oh, this kindness!—it can never be repaid!"

"Cheerfully will I interest myself on your behalf," responded Christoval. "Yes—I will proceed to Barcelona: the newly appointed Captain General of this principality is an acquaintance of mine; and I think I may faithfully promise that everything shall be suspended until after the result of the Marquis of Villebelle's appeal in Captain Russell's favour, to the supreme authorities at Madrid. For the Marquis *must* make this appeal at your intercession——"

"Oh! he will, he will!" exclaimed Kate: "I know that he will! And now there is hope! there is hope!"—and her countenance became radiant with joy.

By this time the gorge was passed—the grove was threaded—and the road reached. The two equipages were waiting; and after a little more conversation, during which Count Christoval gave Kate instructions how to proceed when she reached Madrid,—they were about to separate, when one of the brigands suddenly emerged from the wood with Miss Marshall's trunk upon his shoulder. This, in the liveliness of her joy at being rescued from Ramon's power, she had altogether forgotten: the banditti themselves had likewise forgotten it when she and Christoval had taken their leave: but scarcely had they departed from the spot, when Collantes remembered that the trunk was in his possession, and he lost no time in despatching one of his men in the direction of the road. It came just in time; and Miss Marshall, having once more expressed her fervid gratitude to Don Diego Christoval for the kindness he was showing her, proceeded in the post-chaise in the direction of Madrid, while the Count took the road to Barcelona.

On arriving in this city, Don Diego at once made inquiries respecting Captain Russell; and was much shocked on learning that the trial had taken place on the previous day—that sentence of death had been pronounced—and that the culprit was to be executed, by the strangling process of the *garotte*, on the following morning: that is to say, the morning after the Count's arrival in Barcelona. He lost not a moment in visiting the palace of the Captain-General—not the same, be it well understood, who was governor of the principality at the time when Christoval was an outlaw amongst the mountains. The present Captain-General had only recently been appointed to his present post; and Don Diego had met him in society at Madrid. The General knew everything in favour of Don Diego, and nothing to his discredit: or if he were at all informed on the latter point, he did not choose to remember it on the part of one who was now possessed of considerable wealth. He therefore received the Count with becoming courtesy: but he shook his head when the latter unfolded to him the nature of his business.

"It is impossible, my dear Count," answered the Captain-General: "I dare not suspend the execution of the sentence. You are aware the smuggling on this coast has of late years reached a pitch perfectly intolerable; and even without collateral circumstances of a dark nature, it would be necessary to make an example. But in the present instance there *are* these circumstances; and they are of the blackest dye. Three lives were lost——"

"I am aware of it—too painfully aware of it," responded Christoval: "but your Excellency must bear in mind that the unfortunate prisoner only acted in self-defence, and could not restrain his own men."

"All this was alleged on his behalf at the trial yesterday," responded the Captain-General: "but it could not be denied that he was the leader of the men by whom the slaughter was perpetrated: it was his own vessel whence the landing was effected—his own goods that were attempted to be run ashore. No, Count Christoval—it is impossible—I cannot suspend this sentence!"

"I know not how I can persevere in beseeching your Excellency to grant me the boon I solicit," resumed Don Diego: "but nevertheless, I am emboldened to be thus urgent, because I have before me the image of the young woman who said so emphatically that *his* death would be *her* death likewise."

"And you tell me, Count," said the Captain-General, evidently deliberating within himself, "that this young woman feels confident of being enabled to enlist the interest of the French Embassy on behalf of the prisoner?"

"I have the positive certainty that she will thus far succeed," responded Christoval: "therefore, again do I conjure your Excellency to adopt a merciful view!"

The Captain-General paced to and fro in the spacious apartment for several minutes; and at length stopping short, he said, "Count Christoval, I grant your request. I will order the execution of the sentence to be suspended. Do you wish to see the prisoner? If so, you shall yourself convey to him the announcement that he is respited for the present—that is to say, until the result of an appeal which is being made on his behalf at Madrid, can be known in Barcelona."

"I thank your Excellency for this additional proof of kindness," answered Christoval; "and I will lose no time in visiting the prisoner."

The Captain-General furnished Don Diego with the necessary authority to see Russell; and the Count proceeded at once to the gaol in which the prisoner was incarcerated. He was escorted by a turnkey to the massively-built dungeon where

Kate's lover, heavily ironed, was seated in gloomy reflection. The unhappy man had heard his death-sentence pronounced: he saw not the slightest hope of escape from the dreadful doom thus decreed. But it was not that he feared to die on his own account: he knew that his limbs would not tremble, nor his nerves quiver, when ascending the ladder of the scaffold: it was on behalf of Kate—handsome and well-beloved Kate, once so gay and mirthful—that he was thus deeply desponding. He was, as she had described him, a fine handsome fellow—somewhat coarse-featured, it is true, but with the frank, open, honest look of an English sailor, and with a form the manly symmetry of which was not even concealed by the loose apparel that he wore. He was accustomed, on board his vessel, to wear the simple habiliments of a British tar; and it was in that raiment he had been captured—this raiment that clothed him now.

Count Christoval was, as the reader is aware, a perfect stranger to Ned Russell: but they were not many minutes alone together, before the generous-hearted Spanish nobleman won the grateful esteem of the English mariner. And tears, too, trickled down Ned Russell's sun-burnt countenance, on learning that his own Kate had travelled all the way from England, not merely to see him, but likewise to interest herself on his behalf.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE LONELY INN.

THE reader cannot do otherwise than admire the courage of Kate Marshall, in having undertaken this journey from her own native land to foreign climes on behalf of her lover. Though perfectly ignorant both of the French and Spanish tongues, she had nevertheless made her way through almost the entire length of France; and we now behold her pursuing her travel in Spain. She had set out with no companion to cheer her—with no friend to succour, guide, or defend her. Her father was laid up with a severe attack of the gout at the time she left Dover—otherwise he would have accompanied her: her mother was compelled to remain at home in superintendence of the establishment; and it would have been useless, as well as expensive, for Kate to bring any one of her sisters with her. Therefore was it that she travelled alone,—her only aids being a courageous spirit and a well-filled purse.

As may be supposed, her fortune at meeting with Don Diego Christoval had cheered her considerably,—not merely because he was the means of rescuing her from the power of the Catalan bandits, but likewise because he had so generously volunteered to interest himself to the utmost of his power in the cause of Ned Russell. Kate therefore pursued her journey with brighter hopes than she had previously entertained; and what with the good offices of Count Christoval at Barcelona, and the succour which she expected to receive from the Marquis of Villebelle at Madrid, the heroic young woman was very far from despairing of ultimate success in saving her lover's life. There was much in her character to admire, notwithstanding that, by the way in which she had been brought up, she was not over nice nor particular in certain respects. For instance, smuggling in her eyes was no moral offence; and we have seen her laugh approvingly at the dashing exploits of her former friend and school-companion Elizabeth Paton. But in that virtue which constitutes the chief ornament of the sex, Kate Marshall's character was unimpeachable: never had she strayed from the path of chastity—never had she given encouragement to any libertine look that was fixed upon her. Even before she was engaged to Ned Russell, her behaviour in this respect was most scrupulously proper; and the same may be said of her sisters. She moreover possessed a generous heart and kind disposition: the reader is already aware that she did not lack courage: and thus if her merits were weighed against her faults, it would be impossible to refuse her some slight meed of admiration.

Having parted with Don Diego Christoval in the manner already described, Kate pursued her journey in the chaise. Hours passed—the evening came—and as the dusk closed in, she could not help observing that the road was much narrower than the highway had hitherto appeared to be: indeed, it had rather the appearance of a lane than of the main route. In a few minutes the chaise entered the precincts of a forest: the shade of the huge trees completely shut out the twilight: she was enveloped in darkness. The position was far from an agreeable one. Utterly unacquainted with the Spanish language—and the two muleteers being equally unable to answer her in her own native tongue—she could not question them as to whether they were pursuing the right road. At the several places where the cattle were changed since she parted from Don Christoval, the single word "Madrid," pronounced by her lips, had served as an indication of the direction in which she was to be borne: but she was now seized with misgivings as to the good faith of the muleteers belonging to the last relay—all the terrific tales she had ever read of travellers being murdered in lonely places on the Continent, trooped into her memory—and notwithstanding her courageous disposition, she could not prevent the darkest suspicions from arising in her mind. She had no defensive weapon; and she regretted that she had not provided herself therewith: for though she might be certain to succumb beneath the murderous attack of the muleteers, if such were intended,—it would nevertheless be some satisfaction to possess the means of selling her life as dearly as possible.

While all these reflections were passing through her mind, she suddenly perceived through the chaise-window a light glimmering at a little distance on the right hand; and in a few minutes the lumbering equipage stopped in front of what appeared to be a small inn or public-house. Kate's spirits instantaneously rose again, as the thought struck her that her fears were groundless after all, and that this must be the place where fresh cattle were to be obtained: for she had resolved to tarry not on the route, but to journey straight on with the least possible delay towards the Spanish capital. She did not therefore intend to alight,—but remained seated inside the vehicle, hoping that it would soon be in motion again.

A man and a woman—both of about middle age, and by their appearance evidently the master and mistress of the little inn—came forth with a lantern. Some conversation took place between these persons and the muleteers; and then one of the latter, approaching the vehicle, opened the door and made signs for Miss Marshall to descend. The innkeeper and his wife saluted her with as much courtesy as it was in their nature to display, and also by signs testified their readiness to conduct her into the hostelry. Thinking that it was imagined she needed refreshments,—but having partaken of some at the previous halting-place,—she intimated by signs as well as she was able that she was in a hurry to proceed: whereupon the muleteers,—pointing to their own cattle, and then in the direction of the stable joining the inn—shook their heads, as much as to imply that there was no relay to be had. Kate understood what was meant, and felt sadly perplexed. Oh! if she could but converse with these people in their own language, so as to ascertain how long she was to make up her mind to be delayed: but she could not glean this information—and her only resource was to conjecture that the journey might be renewed at the expiration of an hour or two, when the mules had enjoyed rest and bait. She accordingly followed the innkeeper and his wife into the house, where she was shown to a room on the ground-floor; and without any sign or intimation from herself, a young servant-woman began to spread the table for supper.

Spain is notorious for the indifferent accommodation of its hotels, inns, and taverns, even in the largest and most populous cities: but the secluded and inferior kinds of hostelries are of the very worst and poorest description. The one where Miss Marshall now found herself, was decidedly no exception to the general rule. The room was only lighted by a single candle, and wore the most poverty-stricken appearance, without even the recommendation of cleanliness as a set-off against its sordid aspect and poor accommodation. A few ricketty chairs, a rude table, and a dilapidated side-board, constituted the furniture: while a few miserable prints, representing scriptural scenes, served as embellishments for the walls. There was no drapery to the window; and two of the panes being broken, were stopped up with rags stuffed through,—recourse not even being had to the expedient of pasting paper over the apertures.

Kate sat down, dispirited and uneasy. She liked not this halt in so lonely a place: she could not prevent her previous suspicions from reviving in her mind: for she felt almost convinced that the high road had been deviated from—and the longer she reflected on this circumstance, the more ominous did it appear. By the light of the lantern when she first descended from the vehicle, she had observed the countenances of the innkeeper and his wife; and they were not over prepossessing. She now studied the features of the attendant who was spreading the table. This was a girl of about eighteen—decidedly pretty—but with one of those countenances which are too inexpressive, too quiet and reserved, to afford much indication of the individual's character. She was attired in a very homely manner, but yet with a certain degree of neatness: her figure was light and graceful; and the short petticoats revealed all the lower part of her symmetrical limbs. Indeed, the skirt of her dress did not descend below the middle of the swell of the leg,—thus completely displaying the well-turned ankles. She walked with steps of elastic firmness—carried her head and shoulders well—and, altogether, in personal appearance, was far from uninteresting. She said not a word,—probably having been already informed that the lady-guest was a foreigner and spoke not the Spanish tongue: but every now and then she fixed her dark eyes with an apparent curiosity upon Miss Marshall.

The viands which the girl placed upon the table, were by no means calculated to provoke an appetite; and indeed Kate was in no humour to touch them at all, even if they had been more inviting. She however took something on her plate, so as not to give offence by altogether repudiating the fare; and when the supper was over, the mistress of the inn made her appearance. Her countenance was very much flushed—she had a strange vacant look—and for the first few moments, Kate could not comprehend what was the matter with her. She was not however long at a loss to discover the cause of the woman's excitement: for the smell of her breath and her unsteady movements showed that she was considerably under the influence of liquor. Disgusted beyond expression, Miss Marshall recoiled from the woman's approach: but the latter was too far inebriated to notice the sentiment of loathing which her presence thus inspired. Taking up the candle, she beckoned Kate to follow her: but as Miss Marshall hesitated—not exactly understanding what this new proceeding meant—the woman made signs to show that she purposed to conduct her to a bed-chamber.

Kate was now more than ever a prey to unpleasant misgivings, when she found it was intended that she should pass the night at that lonely inn in the depth of a forest. She issued from the room; and repairing to the place which had already been pointed out to her as the stable, found the muleteers attending to their animals by the light of a lantern suspended to the roof. She pointed to the mules, and then to the chaise which remained standing in front of the hostelry: but the drivers gave her to understand, as well as they were able, that it was their intention to pass the night at the inn. She assumed a peremptory air, again indicating the animals and the vehicle, and making every possible sign to show her anxiety to proceed. The manner in which they shook their heads, was that of dogged determination; and Kate, finding that it was useless to urge them farther, beckoned them to bring her trunk from the chaise into the hostelry. This was at once done; and the inebriate landlady guided the fellow who bore the box, up the narrow and dilapidated staircase. Kate followed; and in a few moments was left alone in a wretchedly furnished little bedroom. The candle, which the mistress of the tavern had placed upon the table, dimly lighted that gloomy-looking and poverty-stricken chamber. Kate sat down, and abandoned herself to her reflections. Her mind was still full of misgivings: but with her natural courage, she endeavoured to reason herself out of them. She had already received experience to the effect that the roads were bad, and the posting-arrangements for travelling wretchedly incomplete, in Spain:—might it

not therefore be, after all, that the highway did really run in the form of a narrow road through this forest? and that previous travellers on this particular day had exhausted the relays of cattle? She had noticed that the stable was a spacious one, and such as might be expected to belong to a posting-house: she had likewise observed that the mules recently unharnessed from the chaise in which she travelled, were the only cattle at present in that stable. Then, too, she argued that the muleteers might not choose to carry their beasts another stage until the morning: or else that the arrival of fresh animals, which might be expected in the night, must be awaited in order to furnish a relay. Such were the conjectures by means of which Kate endeavoured to reassure herself: and then she again thought of the people of the house. It was true that the master and the mistress were of no very prepossessing countenances: but it did did not follow that they should be criminal on that account. The woman was evidently a drunkard: but it was not to be thence inferred that she was anything worse. Besides, there was something interesting about the servant-girl: it was scarcely possible for any crime to be committed beneath that roof without this girl's knowledge; and Kate Marshall did not think so ill of human nature as to suppose that one of her years and appearance was an habitual accomplice in deeds of turpitude.

These were the reflections which her natural courage and intelligence suggested: but still they were not potent enough to reason away the dark suspicions and gloomy apprehensions which had forced themselves upon her mind. What, however, was she to do? To ensure her safety by flight, was out of the question. She could not quit the hostelry unperceived; and if she were indeed in a nest of robbers and murderers—she shuddered at the idea—they would not hesitate to pounce upon her and consummate their purposed criminality at once if she were to make an attempt at escape. It was therefore absolutely necessary to remain and risk whatsoever perils might menace her. As for putting off her apparel and retiring to rest—as she had at first intended when ordering her box to be brought into the hostelry—it was out of the question. She felt that if she went to bed, she could not sleep;—and moreover, haunted by misgivings as she was, she must sit up so as to be prepared for anything that might occur.

She rose from her seat to examine the door: but fastenings there were none. This was a circumstance that did not however tend to confirm her apprehensions, inasmuch as it was by no means likely that such a poverty-stricken place would be furnished with any means of security of that kind. She looked at her watch: it was now half-past ten o'clock;—and the sound of voices reached her ears from below. She gently opened the door, and listened: the muleteers, the master, and mistress of the hostelry were laughing and talking—most probably drinking together. Yes, they were drinking: for Kate now caught the sounds of bottles and mugs; and the odour of tobacco smoke likewise reached her. She thought to herself that if those persons were thus indulging in an orgie, it was by no means likely they had any criminal intentions.

Still she resolved not to be thrown off her guard. The window was at the back of the house: she opened it gently and looked forth; the giant-trees of the forest were dimly seen through the deep gloom of night. Again the thought of escape entered her mind: but she knew not what might be the height of this window from the ground in the rear of the dwelling. The level of that ground might be much lower than in front: the descent from the casement would therefore be perilous to a degree;—and besides, the savage growling of a dog now reached her ears. She shut the window, and sat down again. Notwithstanding her courage, poor Kate was much dispirited. Even if she were assured of her own personal safety, the delay thus experienced in her journey was sufficient to trouble her sorely. Was it not a matter of life or death on which she was bound? was it not to save one who was dearer to her than her own existence?—and therefore, was not her time most precious? And how, too, was she to while away the long mortal hours that must elapse ere morning dawned? She felt fatigued—but dared not lie down to rest: she needed slumber to enable her to sustain the fatigues of the long journey which yet lay before her—but she felt like a person benighted amongst the snows of Alpine regions, where to yield to sleep is to meet certain death. And then, too, she was tortured with the reflection that even if this night should pass away in safety for herself, and that the advent of the morn should enable her to smile at the fears which had haunted her,—she might, after all in the meantime undergone, experience failure in her attempt to save the man whom she loved so well: she might in the end be doomed to encounter the saddest and bitterest disappointment! A few hours back her heart had been elate with hope: but now this hope succumbed beneath the dispiriting influences which surrounded her, and became absorbed in the general despondency which engulfed her soul.

Wearily, wearily did the minutes drag their slow length along: again she looked at her watch in the hope that at least an hour had elapsed since last she consulted it: but only half that period had fled—it was eleven o'clock. The sounds of voices still came from below: once more she opened the door to listen; and she heard the mistress of the hostelry talking in the thick, stammering, hiccupping manner of complete intoxication. Closing the door again, she took from her trunk a book for the purpose of whiling away the time in its perusal: but she could not settle her attention upon its pages; and once more she found herself debating upon the circumstances in which she was placed. She remembered that these muleteers who accompanied this last relay, had seen her draw forth her well-filled purse: she regretted that she had thus displayed it;—and yet she reasoned that even if she had not done so, they must naturally suppose she had ample funds to meet the expenses of her mode of travelling.

Another half-hour passed: and Kate Marshall no longer heard the sounds of voices coming from below. She was almost inclined to lie down and repose her wearied frame: she was deliberating with herself whether by piling her trunk and what little furniture there was in the room against the door, she might not be enabled to guard against a surprise,—when she heard light footsteps approaching across the landing outside.

The latch was raised gently—the servant-girl appeared upon the threshold—and as the light of the candle burning upon the table, reached her countenance, Kate immediately saw that it was very pale. Indeed there was something of subdued horror and deep dismay in the hitherto inexpressive features of the young Spanish woman: so that Miss Marshall was at once smitten with the conviction that peril menaced herself, but that she had found a friend in this girl. The latter—whose name we may as well state to be Paquetta—laid her finger upon her lip, which was naturally of bright vermilion hue, but now ashy colourless, and quivering also: then advancing into the room, she made a sign for Kate not to be alarmed, and extinguished the light. At the same moment she took Miss Marshall's hand, and gently led her forth from the chamber. The crazy boards creaked beneath their feet, light though their steps were; and Paquetta squeezed Kate's hand as an intimation that everything depended upon the noiselessness of their tread. They ascended another flight of stairs: the girl opened a door, still maintaining the utmost caution; and Miss Marshall was guided into a miserable attic where a light was burning. This was evidently Paquetta's own chamber.

Having closed the door as noiselessly as she had opened it, Paquetta made Kate sit down upon the mean and sordid bed: then placing herself by her side, she gazed upon her with a look of mingled compassion, interest, and affright. Having now more leisure to contemplate the girl, Miss Marshall saw that there was evidently a profound horror and dismay influencing her; and, Oh! how earnestly she wished that they could understand each other by means of language, so that explanations on Paquetta's part might relieve Kate from the terrible suspense which was devouring her. She however comprehended sufficient to be aware that the girl was acting a friendly part towards her, and that the present proceeding was undertaken with the hope of rescuing her from some danger—but of what nature, could not be exactly conceived, though it was scarcely difficult to surmise that it was threatened on the part of the people of the house. Kate, taking the girl's hand, pressed it warmly; and by her looks endeavoured to show the amount of gratitude she felt towards her.

Paquetta, again making a sign that the utmost caution must be observed, went to the door—opened it gently—and listened. All however was still; and having closed the door again, she made another sign to the effect that it was necessary to extinguish the light, but that Kate must not suspect her of any treachery. She took Miss Marshall's hand—pressed it to her bosom—and with a look full of eloquence, gave her to understand that she would lay down her own life sooner than injure her. She then extinguished the candle; and the chamber was enveloped in total darkness.

Almost immediately afterwards, steps were heard ascending the lower flight of stairs; and by their uneven pace, and the sounds of a person staggering and stumbling about, Kate had no difficulty in judging that it was the drunken landlady. A door opened and shut on the landing below—the same landing as that on which was situated the chamber whence Miss Marshall had been so mysteriously and ominously fetched away. Then all was still again; and half-an-hour elapsed, during which Kate and Paquetta sat side by side upon the bed,—the latter holding the hands of the former with a kind of firm convulsing pressure in her own. By the way the girl breathed—by the frequent quick starts she gave, as she doubtless fancied she heard some ominous sound—Miss Marshall conjectured that she was expecting something terrible to take place; and it may easily be supposed that her suspense was of the most poignant character—her feelings wrought up to a pitch that was scarcely tolerable. Indeed, the sensation she endured, transcends all power of description: the hideous conviction of imminent danger was excruciating to her soul; and the torture thereof was still more exquisitely refined—rendered still more keen and goading—by the vagueness of her ideas as to what the precise nature of that danger could be. That she was really in a nest of murderers, she could scarcely doubt: whether she should ever go forth thence alive, was involved in a horrible uncertainty: how the Spanish girl hoped to save her by the mere change of one room to another, she could not possibly imagine.

We said that about half-an-hour passed from the moment that the ascent of the inebriate mistress of the hostelry was heard,—half-an-hour of complete silence through the house, but of torturing, rending, excruciating suspense for Kate Marshall—and likewise, as it appeared, for her Spanish companion. At the expiration of that interval, a faint sound—like the creaking of a footstep upon the stairs below—reached their ears. Kate's breath was suspended: nor could she catch the breathing of the girl, which was evidently suspended also:—but she felt the clasp of her companion's fingers tighten spasmodically on her own hands, as if under the influence of intense and awful horror. They listened, we say, with suspended breath: Miss Marshall felt her bosom upheaved, as it were, with that terrible state of mind,—upheaved, and remaining so; for a fearful consternation was upon her. Paquetta drew closer to her—now clinging to her as if conscious that something dreadful was occurring or about to take place. And there, in the darkness were they enshrouded,—in the black darkness which the shade of the trees produced, shutting out whatsoever glimmering light there might be of moon or stars on the face of heaven. And that darkness appeared to be of even Egyptian depth—a darkness that might be felt: for it was associated with the idea that some crime of congenial blackness was about to be consummated!

And now a door was heard to creak on its hinges on the landing below: all was still again for a few instants—and then followed stifling, suffocating sounds, accompanied by strugglings, as of two human beings together, one endeavouring to smother out the life from the other. And therewith was blended the noise of a bed agitating, and creaking, and swaying to and fro, beneath the weight of the strugglers;—and this lasted for more than a minute, during which Paquetta clung with the tenacity of horror and affright to Kate Marshall,—thus clinging with her left arm, while her right hand was placed upon Kate's mouth—a dread and significant intimation that no word nor cry must go forth thence. But from the girl's dreadful condition of mind altogether, Kate could not help

fancying, even amidst her own horrible thoughts, that something was taking place different from what her companion had at first apprehended, and of a nature which, though fully sustaining the tenseness of her feelings, had nevertheless turned them all into another channel.

Those sounds had ceased: stillness prevailed again for a few moments; and then a sudden ejaculation of horror rang through the house. But at the very same moment, the rapid trampling of horses reached the ears of the appalled and dismayed Paquetta and Kate. Those steeds galloped up to the front of the tavern; and then the Spanish girl, with an exclamation of joy, sprang to the window—threw it open—and looking forth, cried out something, which, by its rending tones of entreaty, struck Kate as being a prayer for succour. She also flew to the little latticed casement, which was in the front of the house; and flinging her glances forth, she felt that she was saved: for the rays of a light gleaming from one of the lower windows, were reflected by the sword-hilts of a body of mounted police.

The door of the hostelry was immediately burst in by these officials; and Paquetta, flinging herself with wild joy upon Kate's bosom, fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER CXLIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

INFINITE were the confusion, the din, and the bustle which followed this forcible entry of the Spanish *gendarmes* into the tavern. Kate, while doing her best to restore her companion to consciousness, heard the rush of footsteps up the first flight of stairs—also the loud and menacing voices of the police, and the despairing ejaculations of the landlord. In a few minutes hasty and heavy footsteps ascended the flight to the attic—the door opened—and a *gendarme*, with a candle, appeared upon the threshold. He spoke to Kate Marshall: but she understood him not—and shook her head to make him comprehend that she was a foreigner unacquainted with the Spanish tongue. At this conjuncture Paquetta came back to consciousness: the light which the official carried, showed Kate where there was a pitcher of water in the room: she hastened to give the young woman some of it to drink—and in a few minutes more she was completely recovered. Then Paquetta and the *gendarme* exchanged rapid observations; and the official beckoned her and Kate to descend.

They obeyed his signal; and on reaching the landing below, they perceived the innkeeper in the custody of two of the police. Despair and horror were depicted upon his countenance: he looked the most abject wretch alive. A glance, flung down the staircase, showed Kate that the two muleteers were also in the hands of other officers; and thus was it but too evident that she had experienced a truly miraculous escape from the hands of a set of murderous monsters. But there was yet another phase in the night's proceedings to meet her view. For on the bed in the room originally allotted to herself, and whence Paquetta had so noiselessly and mysteriously conducted her away—upon that bed was stretched the corpse of the landlady, her countenance blackened and swollen, presenting a hideous and loathsome spectacle, with all the evidences of having been smothered or strangled. Now did the terrific truth flash to the comprehension of the horrified Kate Marshall—the mystery was cleared up—she comprehended it all!

The measures of the *gendarmes* were promptly taken. A couple of them hastened to attach the mules to the vehicle; and into this Kate Marshall and Paquetta, by their direction, entered. Kate's trunk was not forgotten: indeed she was treated with the utmost courtesy and respect; and she comprehended that it was as a witness her presence was thus to be required elsewhere. One of the *gendarmes* drove the chaise: the muleteers and the innkeeper, their arms pinioned with cords, were compelled to march on foot in the midst of the mounted band of police, who took good care to keep a firm hold of the long ends of the ropes which bound them. We should add that no other persons belonged to the hostelry besides those already mentioned,—the landlord himself having been accustomed to act as his own hostler—the murdered woman and the servant-girl performing all the domestic duties of so limited an establishment. Before the party quitted the house where the terrific tragedy had occurred, the doors were carefully secured, the police taking the keys away with them,—thus leaving the corpse of the murdered woman behind.

As the chaise rolled on through the darkness of the forest, Kate Marshall testified to the utmost of her power the immensity of that gratitude which she experienced towards her young companion, to whom she indeed deeply felt that she owed her life. She embraced her—she pressed her hands to her lips—she caressed her in the most affectionate and endearing manner; she could not lavish too many proofs of friendship, love, and attachment upon one to whom she lay under such incalculable obligations. Paquetta had by this time recovered her fortitude and presence of mind; and the joy she experienced on account of the providential arrival of the *gendarmes*, absorbed a portion of the otherwise stupendous horror which the tragedy was but too well calculated to excite. Such was also the case with Miss Marshall; and her deliverance from the dreadful dangers which had evidently menaced her, appeared to have the force and significancy of an omen of good in respect to the enterprise which she had in hand on behalf of her lover.

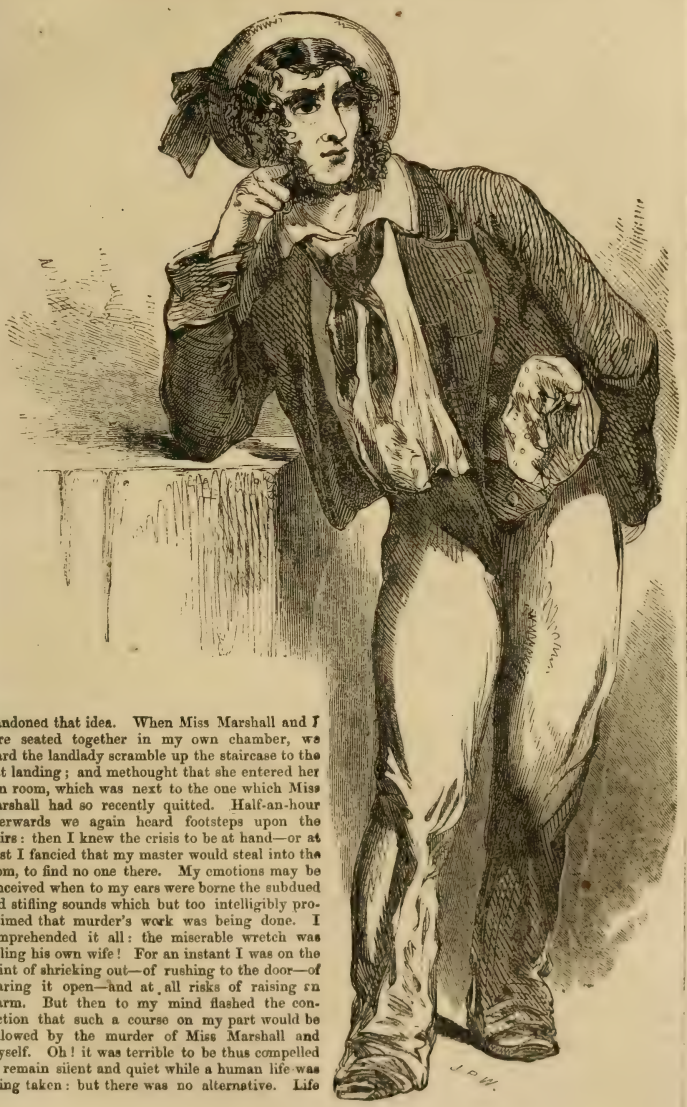
The equipage and the police, with their prisoners, proceeded to the nearest town, which was about three miles distant,—beyond the verge of the forest, and situated on the highway. Indeed, as Kate subsequently discovered, this was the town where she ought to have halted, had not the muleteers diverged from the proper route to take her to a den where murderous work was purposed to be done—and where indeed a victim had been made that night, though not the one whom blackest turpitude had intended to immolate to its greed for gold. On reaching this town, the equipage stopped at a tavern, the inmates of which were summoned from their beds to receive the guests: for Paquetta remained there with Kate Marshall. A chamber was speedily provided for

them; and they shared the same couch—while the police conducted their prisoners to the gaol.

On the following morning Miss Marshall and Paquetta were summoned to the office of the Alcalde, or Mayor, who was prepared to examine into the occurrences of the preceding night. An interpreter was present to assist Miss Marshall in making her deposition; and through this medium she explained how the muleteers had borne her to the lonely hostelry in the forest—how she was compelled to remain there—and the incidents which had subsequently taken place, until the arrival of the *gendarmes*. From this same interpreter she afterwards learnt those particulars which we shall proceed to record. But first of all we must observe that the muleteers, confessing their guilt, revealed such details as threw additional light upon the character of the hostelry and the previous night's tragedy.

It appeared that the innkeeper and his wife had tenanted that hostelry for about a dozen years, during which time they were in league with several muleteers of the district, who were frequently in the habit of conveying unwary foreigners to that den of iniquity, where the unfortunate victims were murdered for the sake of whatsoever they might have about them. Until within six months of the date of which we are writing, no servants were kept at the hostelry: but in consequence of the intemperate habits of the woman, her husband was at length compelled to take a female assistant. Through the recommendation of a shopkeeper in the town—who little knew, however, to what a place he was sending a servant—Paquetta obtained the situation; and during those six months that she was there, she saw nothing to excite her suspicions as to the evil character of her master and mistress. On the particular night to which we are referring, Paquetta overheard some observation between the innkeeper and his wife, immediately after Kate Marshall's arrival, which suddenly filled her with the darkest misgiving. She however had presence of mind sufficient to conceal the suspicion which had thus been engendered; but she resolved to remain on the watch. Though the words which had caught her ears, were vague and indistinct, she nevertheless felt assured that Miss Marshall's life was menaced: and this idea, agitating in her mind, will account for those looks of interest which she fixed upon Kate when laying the supper-cloth, and which Kate mistook for regards of curiosity. At one moment Paquetta thought of flying from the hostelry and hastening to the town, to give information to the police: but at that late hour she feared to venture through the forest—she moreover dreaded lest she should be pursued and overtaken by the landlord, who in that case would have secured his own safety by making away with her: and in addition to these reasons for abandoning her first thought of flight, was the consideration that she might, after all, be mistaken, and had put a wrong meaning on the few vague and indistinct words which her ear had caught. So she tarried at the hostelry—and kept upon the watch. After Kate had been conducted up to the bed-chamber, the girl listed to what was going on, but without being observed; and her worst fears were speedily confirmed. She heard her master speak to the muleteers in a way which corroborated her dark suspicions: she caught the whispered explanation which the landlord gave of how the plan was to be carried out.

"He said,"—quoting Paquetta's own words in giving her deposition to the Alcalde,—"care must be taken that I should obtain no inkling of what was going on: it was therefore too dangerous to cut the Englishwoman's throat, as it would be impossible to efface the stains of blood. He accordingly declared his intention of stealing into her chamber when she was asleep, and smothering her with a bolster. This, he said, he felt convinced of being able to do without any noise to alarm me. The remainder of the plan was thus laid down:—the muleteers were to get the equipage ready at about two in the morning; the corpse should be placed inside the vehicle, to be borne into the depths of the forest, and there buried: and when I came down at the usual hour in the morning, I was to be told that the traveller had taken her departure, leaving a gratuity for me, which trifling sum the landlord would accordingly place in my hand. Such was the horrible project which I overheard: and for a while I was utterly bewildered how to act. I was nevertheless determined to do all I could to save the English lady, even though the attempt should fail and my own life should be forfeited to my master's vengeance. I saw that there were no means of issuing forth unperceived from the house—no means therefore of getting Miss Marshall off in safety. The only chance of accomplishing my purpose," continued Paquetta, "was to induce Miss Marshall to remove stealthily up into my own chamber. I calculated that when my master should penetrate into her room and find she was not there, he would conclude that she had by some means or another suspected his design and made her escape. I also reasoned to myself that if he should come up to my door and ask whether I had seen her, he would be contented with the denial which I should boldly and firmly give; and as he had no reason to suppose that I had been a listener to his plans, there was the greater probability of his putting faith in that denial on my part, and adopting the conclusion that the lady had escaped of her own accord and unassisted by any one else. I accordingly entered Miss Marshall's chamber, expecting to find that she had at least laid herself down, even if she were not disapparelled: I was therefore surprised to find her sitting up. It was however all the more suitable to my purpose, inasmuch as there was no need for delay; and as I saw at once that some suspicion was agitating in her own mind, I had not the slightest trouble in making her comprehend the necessity of following me. I extinguished the light in her room, so as to create as much confusion as possible on the part of my master when he should proceed thither; and by bewildering him to the utmost of my power, render him all the more accessible to the belief that Miss Marshall had fled. For a moment I entertained the idea of putting open the window of her room—tying the bed-clothes together—and letting them hang forth, to confirm the impression that she had escaped: but a second thought convinced me that this stratagem would defeat itself, inasmuch as there was a savage dog in the back premises that would have torn her to pieces if she had really sought to fly in that direction. I therefore



abandoned that idea. When Miss Marshall and I were seated together in my own chamber, we heard the landlady scramble up the staircase to the first landing; and methought that she entered her own room, which was next to the one which Miss Marshall had so recently quitted. Half-an-hour afterwards we again heard footsteps upon the stairs: then I knew the crisis to be at hand—or at least I fancied that my master would steal into the room, to find no one there. My emotions may be conceived when to my ears were borne the subdued and stifling sounds which but too intelligibly proclaimed that murder's work was being done. I comprehended it all: the miserable wretch was killing his own wife! For an instant I was on the point of shrieking out—of rushing to the door—of tearing it open—and at all risks of raising an alarm. But then to my mind flashed the conviction that such a course on my part would be followed by the murder of Miss Marshall and myself. Oh! it was terrible to be thus compelled to remain silent and quiet while a human life was being taken: but there was no alternative. Life

is dear to me: I had vowed also to do my best to save Miss Marshall's;—and shocking though it were to adopt such a course, it was absolutely necessary to suffer *one* life to be smothered away, rather than ensure the certain taking of *two*—and one of these two my own! The wild cry which burst from the landlord's lips bore to my ears the conviction that he had *just then* discovered his horrible mistake; and while that cry was yet ringing through the house, the body of *gendarmes* galloped up to the door. Not an instant did I lose in speaking to them from the window, and imploring succour, as murder was being done beneath that roof: and it must have been Providence itself who sent them at that critical moment to bait their horses at the inn,—for it was the means of ensuring our safety and uprooting a nest of assassins."

But little more remains to be told in order to make the reader fully acquainted with the details of that tragedy in the Spanish forest. From the statement of one of the muleteers it was gathered —as indeed previously surmised—that the innkeeper's wife, being completely overcome with liquor, was ordered by her husband to get up to bed, so that the house might be quiet and the murderous scheme carried into execution as soon as possible. It was but too clear that the miserable woman staggered into the first chamber to the door of which her uncertain steps brought her; and throwing herself upon the bed, at once fell into a profound sleep. From this slumber she was only awakened for a few swift brief passing moments, to struggle and writhe in death-agonies beneath the bolster which her miscreant husband retained with tremendous force over her countenance. There can be little doubt that on her ceasing to move, he felt amongst her garments for the purse which he supposed to be concealed there; and that the texture of the raiment suddenly sent the hideous, horrible, blasting conviction to his mind that it was his own wife whom he had thus assassinated!

All the depositions being duly taken down in the presence of the Mayor, Miss Marshall intimated, through the medium of the interpreter, that it was of vital consequence for her to be allowed to continue her journey to Madrid; and she therefore hoped that the purposes of justice might be served without any farther detention on her part. This request was promptly acceded to, —there being ample evidence against the accused to ensure their conviction. The Mayor was so much pleased with the conduct of Paquetta throughout the transaction, that he introduced her to his wife, who proposed to take her into her service in the capacity of lady's-maid. The girl, being an orphan, and entirely dependent on her own resources, joyfully and gratefully accepted the proposition. Before parting from Paquetta, Kate Marshall—speaking by means of the interpreter—offered to make her a present of as large a sum from her purse as she could possibly spare: but the young Spanish girl replied, through the same medium, that there were services which one fellow-creature could render to another of too holy and sacred a character to be recompensed by gold; and that the service she had been enabled to afford Miss Marshall was one of these. In short she positively declined to accept anything; and Kate parted from her with the most affectionate and lively demonstrations of gratitude.

In order to finish this episode without the necessity of recurring to it, we may as well observe that in the course of a few weeks after the tragedy in the forest, the innkeeper and the two muleteers expiated their crimes upon the scaffold,—death being inflicted by the infamous process of the garotte.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR.

KATE MARSHALL arrived safely in the Spanish capital; and took up her residence at a modest but respectable tavern to which Count Christoval had directed her amongst other parting instructions which he had given her in Catalonia. One of the principal reasons which he had for recommending her to this hostelry, was that the landlady spoke English with tolerable accuracy; and being a good-hearted woman, was certain to afford Miss Marshall all necessary aid and information.

It was night when Kate arrived at Madrid on the day after the examination by the Alcalde; and on the following morning she repaired, with the hotel-porter as her guide, to the residence of the Marquis of Villebelle. Infinite was her disappointment on learning that this nobleman had left the day before for Paris, in company with the Marchioness; and that they were likely to remain absent for six weeks—even if the Marquis should return to that diplomatic post at all, he having the prospect of a higher and more lucrative appointment. This was a terrible blow for poor Kate: she knew not what to do: but dispirited and desponding, she retraced her way to the hostelry.

She was not however a young woman likely to abandon herself to utter despair; and though seriously afflicted, she summoned all her energies to her aid, that no time should be lost in adopting some specific course. She sat down and wrote two letters,—one to Count Christoval at Barcelona, beseeching his advice—the other to the Marquis of Villebelle, which, at the landlady's suggestion, she addressed to the care of the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Paris, it being certain that to this functionary Villebelle's first visit would be paid on his arrival in the French capital; and as he was not likely to travel day and night without intermission, the letter would in all probability reach its destination before him.

On the following day Kate had the satisfaction of receiving a letter from Don Christoval at Barcelona,—written however before he could of course have received her's. It was to the effect that he had completely succeeded with the Captain-General in procuring a respite for Edward Russell until the result of her proceedings on her lover's behalf should be made known. Don Diego moreover informed Kate that the Captain-General was vested with sufficient authority to extend this respite for three weeks, which he had no doubt would be done; and therefore the Count expressed a hope that in the interval Miss Marshall would find her endeavours crowned with complete success. The intelligence thus conveyed in Count Christoval's

letter, was satisfactory even beyond her hopes, under present circumstances: for there was ample leisure in the meantime for the Marquis of Villebelle to interest himself in her lover's behalf. She felt assured that he would do so: and she awaited in confidence the arrival of letters from that nobleman in due course. But before any came, she received another communication from Don Diego Christoval, in answer to her own. It was to the effect that he himself possessed not the slightest interest with the Ministers then in power, their politics and his being at extreme variance: otherwise he would have before volunteered to exert himself in those quarters. He gave Kate to understand that if he were thus to take up her cause, such a step would only prejudice it and lead to a certain refusal. It was therefore useless for him to make the attempt: while on the other hand, it was of the highest consequence that he should remain at Barcelona in order to prevent the Captain-General from signing the warrant of execution until the full period of respite which he was enabled to grant, should have elapsed. The Count's letter, which was penned in a strain of true brotherly sympathy, concluded by encouraging such hope as he dared hold out, and proffering such condolence as it was proper for him to express.

A few days afterwards, Kate received letters from Paris. One was from the Marquis of Villebelle, couched in the kindest terms, and enclosing a note of the most urgent entreaty to the Minister of the Interior, beseeching that the boon which the bearer thereof might solicit should be granted. The other letter was from Constance, whom we suppose we must call the Marchioness of Villebelle;—and this was penned in the warmest and most affectionate strain,—assuring Kate that neither herself nor her husband would ever forget the services they had received at her hands when at Dover, and proffering the sincerest sympathy. This letter also contained an enclosure; it was addressed to the wife of the Minister of the Interior, beseeching this lady to espouse the cause of Miss Marshall and to use her influence with her husband to procure the grant of the boon which would be requested. Both these letters—we mean that of the Marquis to the Minister, and that of the Marchioness to the Minister's wife—were written in English; thus proving that those for whom they were intended, were conversant with that language, —and also serving to convince Kate (they being left unsealed for her perusal) that the cause which she had at heart was espoused in no lukewarm manner by the generous friends whose interest she had thus secured.

Miss Marshall arrayed herself in the handsomest garb she had brought with her from England; and indeed she looked uncommonly handsome. Her fine shape, rich in its modelled but well-adjusted proportions, was set off to the best advantage: while the flutter of hope and suspense sent up a carnation hue to her cheeks. When her toilet was completed, she repaired in a hired vehicle to the private residence of the Minister of the Interior,— this being about noon, and her kind-hearted landlady informing her that it was the best hour for waiting upon that functionary. On arriving at the Minister's house, Miss Marshall was conducted to a waiting-room, where some half-dozen other persons desirous to see the great man, were seated; and each of these was summoned in turn to the reception-apartment. At length Kate found herself alone in the waiting-room; and her heart palpitated with still more anxious flutterings than hitherto, as she said to herself that the next time the door opened, it would be to admit the usher who was to summon her into the presence of him who with a breath could restore her to perfect happiness or plunge her into the deepest abysm of woe. Half-an-hour elapsed while she thus remained alone; and it appeared to her the longest half-hour she had ever passed in her life. But at length the door opened—the usher made his appearance—she was conducted across a spacious landing—a door was thrown open—and she entered a large and splendidly furnished cabinet, where the Minister of the Interior was negligently lounging in a large arm-chair, and a secretary sat writing at a desk.

When a person is about to enter for the first time into the presence of a celebrated or highly-placed individual, the imagination invariably depicts to itself some portraiture as the ideal of such individual's appearance; and with the possessor of Ministerial functions, is generally associated the idea of at least a mature age, if not an advanced one. Thus was it that Kate Marshall had fancied she was about to behold an elderly or an old man, with gray hair—a calm and dignified expression of countenance—and sedate manners, accompanied with a certain degree of awe-inspiring reserve. The portraiture she had thus in imagination drawn, was not justified in any one single point by the actual reality. The Minister of the Interior was a young man, scarcely thirty years of age—with a profusion of raven black hair—a glossy moustache, and well curled whiskers. His features were regular—his countenance pale, with a slight tinge of sallowness: his eyes were dark and full of fire—while the somewhat bluish circles in which they appeared to be set, denoted either the wear and tear of close application to business, or else the workings of strong passions combined with habits of dissipation. He was of slight figure—short of stature, but well made. His looks had a certain vivid keenness: his glances were of penetrating sharpness, as if he sought to pierce through and through the soul of any one accosting him. He was dressed in deep black—but with a certain air of fashionable elegance not altogether devoid of pretension.

We may here as well observe that the Minister was one of those unscrupulous and ambitious political adventurers, who, taking advantage of the disturbed state of Spanish politics, and attaching themselves to the faction which was then dominant, had suddenly arisen from comparative obscurity into power and importance. Only a year had elapsed since the storm of insurrections, sweeping over Spain, had terminated in the abdication of the Regency by the liberal-minded and magnanimous Espartero: and the reign of military terrorism, established by Narvaez and the adherents of Queen Christina, was now rampant. Men of unscrupulous dispositions were required as the chief political agents of this revived despotism; and the present Minister of the Interior was one of these. He had been the editor of a journal noted for its violent animosity to Espartero: at the beginning of the insurrection he had done his

best to defame the character of that true-hearted patriot; and his services were rewarded by a portfolio in the Cabinet. But his induction into the Ministry was not merely a recompense for his past conduct: it had likewise been brought about by the want of such personages as himself to carry out the views of the new *regime*. Of all these circumstances Kate Marshall was ignorant,—she knowing but little of Spanish politics; and the landlady of the hotel, being too much accustomed to behold mere adventurers suddenly rising into high places, had not thought it worth while to give her English guest any detailed information upon the subject.

It is not the custom for persons seeking an interview with a Spanish Minister at his own private residence, to send in their cards, nor make any previous announcement of the object of their visit. Thus, until Kate Marshall entered that room, the high functionary whom we have described, had not the least notion who was about to appear before him. He was evidently struck with the handsome person of the English woman; and his dark eyes, having surveyed her from head to foot, settled upon her countenance, where the colour was coming and going in rapid transitions according as she was swayed by the varied emotions excited in her heart. She would much rather have found the Minister to be a personage corresponding with the portraiture which her imagination had drawn, than what she now found him to be: for there was something about him but little encouraging to one who had so important a boon to solicit. In a word, he seemed an individual who could be merciless and implacable if he chose; and poor Kate was for the first few instants tortured by her apprehensions. He did not at once address her; but with his eyes fixed upon her countenance, evidently waited for her to give an explanation of her business. With trembling hands she drew forth the letter which the Marquis of Villebelle had sent, addressed to the Minister; and as she presented it, her looks fell beneath the searching—almost burning and gloating gaze, which he rivetted upon her. Then his eyes settled upon the paper; and having perused it, he made a sign for the secretary to retire. The command was obeyed; and Kate was now alone with the Minister of the Interior.

"And you are Miss Marshall, I presume?" he said, speaking in very excellent English. "Be seated?"—and he indicated a chair close by his own, and nearly opposite,—so that by turning slightly round, he could still survey his fair applicant from head to foot, as she tremblingly took that seat. "The Marquis of Villebelle," he went on to observe, "has written very strongly on your behalf. Will you explain the nature of the boon you seek at my hands?"

"Your Excellency may perhaps be aware," responded Kate, speaking in tremulous accents, and still with looks bent down beneath the ardent gaze which was fixed upon her and filled her mind with a vague trouble,—"your Excellency is perhaps aware that an English sailor named Edward Russell——"

"Enough, Miss Marshall!" he gently interrupted: "I am acquainted with all the incidents:"—then, pointing to the desk at which his secretary had been writing, he added, "Amongst those papers, lie the documents connected with the case. I learn from his Excellency the Captain-General of Catalonia, that by virtue of the authority invested in him, he has temporarily suspended the execution of the sentence. Can you point out to me any substantial reasons wherefore a commutation of the sentence should be effected——or," added the Minister, more slowly, and as Kate thought, with a strange significancy of look, "a pardon should be granted? But first of all I should perhaps inquire wherefore you yourself are so interested in this man? The Marquis of Villebelle merely represents you as being thus deeply interested—but leaves all explanations to be given by yourself."

"Edward Russell is my affianced husband," answered Kate, the colour now mantling vividly upon her cheeks, down which tears were at the same time trickling.

"Ah! the romance of a love-affair!" ejaculated the Minister, with a smile: and as Miss Marshall raised her eyes at the moment, she thought that smile was somewhat encouraging.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed; "I have travelled from my native place in England, with the hope of saving a life which is dearer than my own! I have endured and suffered much—I have journeyed day and night—I have deemed no fatigue too great, no peril too menacing, to be encountered in the prosecution of my object! In the midst of a forest my life was within a hair's breadth of succumbing to the murderous designs of assassins——"

"Ah, I recollect!" exclaimed the Minister. "The papers have been forwarded to me; and methought when I ere now read your name in the Marquis of Villebelle's letter, it was not altogether unfamiliar. Yes—I have perused those official documents, sent by the Alcalde of the town where the investigation took place; and from the depositions it is indeed but too clear that you experienced a very narrow escape. But you must love this Edward Russell very much that you have dared such fatigues and so many dangers on his behalf?"

"Oh! I have endured more than has come to your Excellency's knowledge," cried Kate, thus alluding to her arrest by the Catalan banditti: but instantaneously recollecting that this was an episode to which, for Count Christoval's sake, she ought not even to have glanced, she quickly added, "But no matter, sir! All that I have undergone, will be esteemed light indeed, if the result should prove favourable to my object. Oh, let me not implore your Excellency in vain!"

The young woman—full of acute suspense, and not knowing what to hope at the hands of this man who gazed upon her in a way that filled her heart with vague uneasiness—spoke in vehement and impassioned accents; while the tears continued to trace their crystal pathway down her cheeks. The Minister still surveyed her with an attention which might be merely replete with compassionate interest, but which nevertheless had a certain expression of libertine ardour; and this expression it was that caused the trouble which was racking the afflicted applicant.

"You are too intelligent, Miss Marshall," he said, "not to comprehend that this offender—to use no harsher term—has rendered himself ob-

noxious to the severest criminal laws of the country. I am aware it was argued in his defence that no life was taken by *his* special hand: but he was the leader of a party committing an unlawful act—and the weapons of his followers spilt the blood of Spanish subjects. Were he a Spaniard himself—were he possessed of high interest and influential connexions—I should still be unable to listen favourably to any appeal made on his behalf. What, then, can I say to you? With every disposition to attend to the strong and urgent recommendations of my friend the Marquis of Villebelle—with every disposition, too, to serve a young lady of your appearance—I am afraid——"

"No, sir—do not crush me with despair at once! Do not—do not, I entreat you!"—and Kate Marshall fell upon her knees before the Minister.

"Rise," he said, taking her hand: and as she obeyed him, he still continued to hold that hand in his own—while at the same instant an unmistakable expression of passionate desire glowed upon his features. "Perhaps," he went on to observe, "a means may be found——"

Kate understood him in a moment. It was no longer possible to doubt his meaning: it was conveyed in the significancy of his look—the pressure which she felt her hand was sustaining—his entire appearance. In short, that high public functionary had revealed himself as an unprincipled libertine, about to make an overture which was comprehended even before it was uttered. Kate snatched away her hand: the flush of indignation glowed upon her features; and she was turning away, when, suddenly smitten by the idea—it was a last faint hope—that she might possibly have misinterpreted his meaning and done him an injustice, she fixed her eyes steadily upon his countenance, saying, "Surely, sir—surely, you will not suffer me to depart with the conviction that there is no mercy in the soul of a Spanish statesman!"

"Sit down once more, Miss Marshall," responded the Minister, suddenly becoming cold and haughty: then, as she resumed her seat, he went on to observe, "I explained to you ere now, that even if the plea for mercy on behalf of this offender were backed by high family interest, I should not know how to concede the point. You yourself must comprehend the difficulty of obtaining such a concession. There are no grounds upon which a pardon can be accorded, or a commutation of the sentence be decreed. But if it would be difficult to yield to an interest really powerful, how can you expect me to give an affirmative answer to the intercession of a stranger? Should I not be seriously compromising myself? should I not be liable to the attacks of those ill-conditioned persons who are ever ready to hold up public men to scorn and hatred, to suit their own factious aims? In a word, should I not be running an immense risk by diverting the tide of justice from its course, in a case which presents not the least ground for such a proceeding on my part?"

"I am aware of all this, sir," responded Kate: "but, Oh! the satisfaction which your own heart will experience——"

She stopped short, as a half-scornful smile began wreathing the moustached lip of the Minister. Hope, which had again been rising—though faintly enough, it is true—in her bosom, sank down again, like the wing-wearied bird from some ineffectual soaring into a celestial region; and she felt that her heart was weeping tears of blood, at the same time that a fresh gush of the crystal tide poured forth from her eyes.

"Yes," the Minister resumed; "great indeed is the risk that I should run: and permit me to remind you, Miss Marshall, that the days of romance are over. We live in times of stern reality—in times when the actions of individuals are necessarily influenced by a certain degree of personal selfishness. The Marquis of Villebelle, were he now present, would himself assure you that the boon you solicit is one which no Minister would be likely to grant—save and except under circumstances of an extraordinary character. In a word, you ask a life. What if I grant it? Is there to be no recompense for me?"

"Yes, sir," responded Kate, now speaking with renewed firmness: "your reward will be found in the consciousness of having performed a deed which will raise up two of your fellow-creatures from the abyss of woe, to the height of exultant happiness. And in the warm gratitude of our hearts——"

"Oh, that universal word *gratitude!*" exclaimed the Minister scornfully: "it is uttered by every one who has a favour to ask. Young lady, do you not reflect that every criminal now in a Spanish gaol, might send a relative, a lover, or a friend, to demand of me a similar boon, and offer a similar reward,—the boon being a life which is implored—the recompense, gratitude! In good sooth I should thrive upon so much gratitude, were it of a substantial, a tangible, and a serviceable value. But it is nothing—a mere airy word—an empty name! Must I once more remind you that individual actions are now ruled by selfishness? You ask me a life: the favour you demand is immense—the greatest, the highest which it is in mortal's power to bestow. And in return, you offer a recompense the meanest, the poorest, the paltriest, the most contemptible!"

"Oh, sir!" murmured Kate, rising from her seat, and almost convulsed with affliction; "if the treasures of the whole world were at my disposal, I would lay them at your feet: but, alas! I have not wherewithal to give you such reward as may be commensurate with the boon that I implore."

"Gold?—who spoke of gold?" said the Minister, contemptuously. "I have enough. It was not to paltry dross that I for a moment alluded. Were you an old wrinkled hag, and if you were enabled to lay at my feet countless sums of the yellow metal, I should at once return an abrupt negative to your demand. But is there no reward which a young and beautiful woman can bestow?"

"Now, sir, I dare not for another moment seek to blind myself to the true nature of your meaning!" — and as Kate Marshall thus spoke, her whole appearance indicated the sudden uprising of womanly pride and dignity. "You wield great and almost sovereign power—you have authority of life and death: but your present conduct towards a friendless foreign woman who implores a boon at your hands, is not the finest chapter in your career. He whom I love must perhaps die—and my own heart will be broken:

but the time may come when your Excellency will look back with remorseful sorrow upon the incident of this day, and when perhaps you will regret that you have thus planted a dagger into a bosom already too deeply wounded."

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall was moving towards the door, when the Minister exclaimed, "Stop! Perhaps *you* may yet think better of your own conduct—and *then* it will be too late. Remember that with one stroke of the pen I can give you the life which you demand: but also with a stroke of the pen, I can order it to be be taken away within the week that is passing!"

"But you will not do this deed of cruelty!" cried Kate, once again having recourse to intercession. "No—you will not do it! Ah, sir! you are a married man—you have a wife who doubtless loves you——"

"It is useless, young lady," interrupted the Minister, "for us to continue arguing thus. Understand well your own position—think not of mine. Your lover lies under sentence of death: with the least sacrifice on your part you can save him—a sacrifice, too, the secret of which need never be known to him——"

"Enough, sir!" ejaculated Kate Marshall, once more displaying all the prideful dignity of an injured, outraged woman: "I have already heard too much. Edward Russell must die——" She paused for a few moments, as the tide of unutterable feelings surged up into her throat, and the tears came to the very brims of her eyes: but with an almost preterhuman effort she kept them back; and in a voice of unnatural calmness, went on to say, "Yes—he must die! for he would not consent to be saved at such a sacrifice as that which you have dared to suggest. Ah! you spoke of keeping the foul atrocity away from his ears? Think you that I could look him in the face without the tell-tale blush of shame revealing my dishonour? No: I am not the adept in dissimulation which your Excellency may be. And as for him whose life I am come to ask,—I repeat that he would scorn to accept it on such conditions: he would execrate *you*—he would loathe *me*—he would refuse to retain a life that had been purchased by so much villany on the one hand, and so much pollution on the other. Yes, sir—the contemned, the branded, the doomed smuggler has his own fine feelings, at least in one sense; and those feelings finer than you, who are a great Minister, can possibly boast of possessing! These feelings, sir, shall not be wounded nor outraged by me! Oh, in my eyes, infinitely superior is that contemned, branded, and doomed smuggler—though wearing the felon's chains in a dungeon-cell—infinitely superior is he, I say, than the great statesman who stands before me now, proposing in his dastard cowardice, and abhorrent meanness of soul, to make a human life the subject of barter for a woman's honour! I leave you, sir: I leave you to the enjoyment of such feelings as you may be enabled to experience after a scene such as this. I leave you for the purpose of writing to the Marquis of Villebelle, and informing that generous nobleman how his well-meant letter has been received, and the treatment it has procured me at your hands. But that is not *all*:—for wheresoever words may proclaim the infamy of your conduct, shall I make it known; and there is in my heart the conviction that the day must come when you will shrink appalled and in utter loathing from the contemplation of your villany."

The Minister of the Interior had listened coldly in one sense, but with impassioned feelings in another, to the long, the eloquent, and the reproachful address which Kate Marshall thus delivered. He listened coldly, we say, because he was unmoved and unaffected by the bitterness and terrible satire of her remarks: he was not even angered by them: the words, though barbed like arrows, fell innocuously away from a soul too much indurated by an utter unscrupulousness of character to be penetrated by them. But on the other hand the Minister was more than ever excited by the beauty of Kate's appearance. Indeed, superbly handsome did the young woman seem then,—with the flush of indignation upon her cheeks—her blue eyes lighted up with fire—her nostrils dilating—her ivory teeth looking brilliant between the coral lines that were wreathed with the strong accentuation of her language—her fine bust swelling as if about to burst through the corsage which imprisoned it—her whole form appearing to expand into a nobler stature and more magnificent proportions, as she thus boldly stood, dealing forth the terrible invective of her outraged feelings. The Minister had likewise risen from his seat; and though his attitude seemed indicative of a cool *nonchalance*, yet there was a burning fire of lustful passion in his eyes—the hectic of that same gloating desire upon his cheeks—and the hot breath came thick and almost panting from his parched throat and between his quivering lips. Strange and striking was the contrast between those two beings,—the fine form of the English-woman expressing the prideful indignation of her sex—the short slender figure of the Minister seeming as if it might be overwhelmed by the immensity of that anger. And yet the one whose aspect was so glorious, was impotent for all such purpose: while the one whose presence was so insignificant, was endowed with the mightiest power.

"Stop yet one moment, Miss Marshall!" said the Minister, as she was turning away: "it is not the proposition which I am about to renew—but a piece of advice that I am about to give. Beware how you write to the Marquis of Villebelle aught that shall be derogatory to myself. Remember that I have the power of intercepting your correspondence at the Post-office, and of suppressing it if unpalatable to me. Beware likewise how, on going forth from this cabinet, you breathe a single word to my prejudice: for again I say, remember that I have powers whereof I should not fail to make use. And those powers I would exercise ruthlessly — mercilessly. Your chamber should be invaded by *gendarmes*: ignominiously should you be hurried through Spain in their custody—and turned adrift on the frontier of Portugal or of France. If therefore you have a friend, a confidant, or an adviser in the Spanish capital, see that you explain in guarded terms the particulars of this interview. Madrid is vast—its buildings are numerous but there is not a wall which hath not ears to drink in whatsoever may be spoken to the disadvantage of those who occupy high places. Follow my counsel—and you will not be molested: disobey me in only a single tittle, and you shall be made to rue the conse-

quences. And now one word more! From a certain date the Captain-General of Catalonia had power to suspend your lover's sentence for three weeks:—of that period ten days have already expired! It would not be safe for you to suffer more than another week at the very outside to elapse ere you definitely resolve upon the course you will adopt. During this week, therefore, which is now to ensue, I shall at any instant be prepared to receive another visit from Miss Marshall. But if you come again——and you *will* come——let it be with the fore-knowledge that argument is useless, intercession vain, upbraiding a mere airy nothing. If you come, therefore, let it be with the firm resolution of adopting the only alternative that may save your lover's life."

During the delivery of this infamous speech, Kate Marshall's countenance expressed, as she listened, every variety of feeling which the several portions thereof were but too well calculated to excite. Pain the most mentally acute—indignation the most highly wrought—astonishment the most confounding—disgust the most ineffable—abhorrence the most intense,—all in their turn were these experienced by the young English woman. When the speech was over, she was about to turn away, and in silence take her departure: but she felt that she could not thus withdraw unavenged by the only weapons which she had to wield—namely, *words!*—and therefore she tarried a few moments longer to give expression to her sentiments.

"I had read and I had heard," she said, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, "that Spain is degenerate: but sunken indeed it must be below the uttermost extreme of my conception, when amongst its rulers it reckons such a man as thou! What? you would violate the sanctity of correspondence entrusted to the very means of conveyance which the Government itself monopolizes, leaving none other open? You commit a hideous crime by proposing to barter a human life against a woman's honour; and yet if the injured one dares speak of your enormity, you threaten to treat her as if *she* were the culprit and *you* were the law's vindicator? And you tell me that you know I shall come back to you—and that when I do come, I must be prepared to surrender myself without another murmur to your arms? ——Oh, sir! is it possible that you could address me thus and not avert your looks in shame?"

Having thus spoken, Kate Marshall turned away from the Minister's presence, and issued forth from the cabinet. Had she paused another moment to observe his countenance, she would have seen that so far from being moved or affected by the way in which she had spoken, there was only a slight perceptible scornful wreathing of his lip; and as the door closed behind her, he said to himself, as if in allusion to her prideful indignation, "Nevertheless, she will come back again."

And in the afternoon of that same day, the Minister of the Interior appeared in the Chamber of Deputies; and in an eloquent speech proposed a measure for giving an impulse to the moral and religious improvement of the people. And any one to have heard him dilate with all his oratorical power upon the necessity of encouraging lofty, refined, and honourable notions amongst the masses, would have thought that he himself must be deeply imbued with the sense of his high and important subject.

CHAPTER CXLV.

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

Miss Marshall issued from the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior with mingled feelings of anguish and indignation. Such was indeed her state of mind, she forgot she had about her the letter of the Marchioness de Villebelle, addressed to the Minister's wife. She entered the hired vehicle which had brought her thither, and was already half-way back to the hotel, when the circumstance of this letter flashed to her mind. Hope for a moment sprang up within her: but it vanished almost as quickly, as a second thought suggested that no wife, however excellent-hearted, could possibly wield any influence for good over such a husband as the man whom she had just left. She was almost inclined to abstain from delivering the letter altogether,—when she reflected that not a single stone should be left unturned that might, even by the remotest possibility, tend to the accomplishment of the aim which was dearer than her own life: and she resolved to present this letter.

Not choosing, however, to return to the Ministerial abode in the vehicle which might be recognised by the Minister himself from the windows —supposing that he had watched her departure, —and being also unable to make the driver understand that she wished to return thither, Kate stopped the chaise and alighted. She remembered the proper direction to be pursued; and after a quarter of an hour's walk, came once more in sight of the mansion. At that very instant she beheld the Minister issue forth and enter his carriage, which immediately rolled away: for he was now proceeding to the Chamber of Deputies. She was glad that he had thus left his house, at the time that she was about to seek an interview with his lady; and when the carriage was out of sight, she proceeded to the private entrance of the dwelling. Mentioning the name of the Minister's wife, she was at once conducted up a handsome staircase, into a large and elegantly furnished apartment,—where the domestic, perceiving she could not speak the Spanish tongue, politely motioned her to be seated. She waited in that room for nearly half-an-hour—at the expiration of which interval, the door opened and a lady made her appearance.

The Minister's wife was a remarkably fine woman, of about Kate's own age—namely, between four and five-and-twenty. She was tall, well made, and of similar proportions to those of Miss Marshall. Indeed, her contours were precisely of that same Hebe-richness adjusted to the most admirable symmetry, which characterized the Englishwoman. To be more particular still, a dress that was made for the one would have exactly fitted the other. But if in the height of stature and in the modelled forms of shape, there existed this similitude between the Minister's wife and Miss Marshall, the personal resemblance went no farther,—the former being of Spanish duskiness of complexion, with

raven hair and large dark eyes. Unlike the Spanish women generally, however, this lady wore her hair in a profusion of ringlets and tresses, which admirably became the perfectly oval shape of her countenance. She was handsome,—with regular features, bright red lips, and a superb set of teeth: while the rich carnation blood appeared on the cheeks beneath the diaphanous olive tint of the skin. Altogether she was a lady whose beauty might be termed brilliant; and she was as commanding and gracefully majestic, as her husband in stature and appearance was insignificant and minister-looking. There was however upon her countenance a certain air of pensive melancholy, which seemed to denote that she was not altogether happy in her mind; and notwithstanding the affability of her manner, this spirit of thoughtfulness —almost amounting to mournfulness—displayed itself in a certain degree of languor. Kate was immediately prepossessed in her favour: for she felt convinced that the wife was very different from the husband.

"Pardon this intrusion, madam," she said, thus addressing in her native English the Spanish lady: "but I have been emboldened to wait upon you in order to present a letter from the Marchioness of Villebelle."

"Ah! my English friend, the Marchioness—that sweet amiable creature!" said the Minister's wife, a smile appearing at once upon her lips; as if she heard with unfeigned pleasure the name of one whose acquaintance she valued. "Pray be seated: for whosoever comes with a letter of introduction from either the Marquis or the Marchioness of Villebelle, must be truly welcome here."

Kate presented the letter: and in so doing she sighed audibly, through fear that the present proceeding would prove useless, as all the incidents of her interview with the Minister swept vividly through her memory. The lady's ear caught that sigh; and fixing her large dark eyes intently upon Miss Marshall, she said in a low murmuring voice, but still speaking in the English language, —"And you too are unhappy!"

Kate hastily averted her head to conceal her tears: and the Minister's wife, thinking that the letter would no doubt afford her some insight into the cause of that sorrow which her visitress but too evidently experienced, addressed herself to its perusal without saying another word.

"Miss Marshall," said the Spanish lady, when she had read the letter, "it is impossible for any one to appear before me more strongly recommended than yourself. To the extent of my limited power, you may command my services. Not merely on the ground of this recommendation will they be cheerfully afforded—but likewise because you belong to a nation for whom I entertain an esteem amounting to an affection. I was educated for some years in England, and received the kindest treatment from every one with whom I came in contact. Delay not therefore to give me such explanations as may enable me to tell you at once to what extent you may reckon on my influence."

Kate Marshall's tale was soon told: but in speaking of the interview which had so recently passed between herself and the lady's husband, she did not of course allude to the infamous proposal he had made her—but merely stated that his Excellency had declined to grant her request.

"Profoundly grieved am I, Miss Marshall, to enhance your affliction," said the lady, speaking in a voice indicative of the most compassionate sympathy: "for it would be wrong on my part to encourage a hope the realization of which I cannot foresee—much less promise. You cannot disguise from yourself—I am sure you are too intelligent to make such an attempt—that the case of the unfortunate man in whom you are so deeply interested, is no ordinary one?"

"I know it—alas, I know it but too well, lady!" responded Kate, with profound mournfulness. "Indeed, I have been made to understand that it is so. But surely, surely, there is mercy to be shown even to one who has so grievously offended against the laws of your country as he?"

"Did my husband hold out no hope?" inquired the lady: "none?—not the slightest whatsoever?"

"None, madam," answered Kate: but as she thus spoke, the colour mounted to her cheeks an instant before so pale; and if her own life had depended on it, she could not have prevented herself from looking troubled and confused — this trouble and this confusion, too, being enhanced when she perceived that the Minister's wife was now gazing upon her with a peculiar manner of penetration.

"And his Excellency held out no hope?" said the lady, slowly emphasizing her words, and looking with keen earnestness at Kate, as if she did not altogether believe the response that had been given, and bade her tax her memory for something that lurked in the background.

"Madam, I entertain no hope at the hands of your husband," replied Miss Marshall: then feeling that her confusion and her trouble were augmenting, and consequently becoming all the more visible, she burst into tears,—exclaiming passionately, "All my hope is now centred in yourself and in heaven!"

The Minister's wife rose from her seat, with a certain expression of countenance that appeared to be almost anguished; and she turned abruptly aside: then, as suddenly accosting Kate again, she said in a low voice, "Miss Marshall you have not told me *all!* I understand it!—I comprehend the noble delicacy of your conduct — and I thank you!"

And this voice in which the Spanish lady spoke, was not merely low—it was likewise so altered from its natural tones that Kate was smitten with dismay; and gazing up into the countenance that was bent over her, as she herself retained her own seat, she saw that it was deadly pale—with that pallor, too, which is always the more ghastly and the more fearful when displayed by the face of a brunette. The idea naturally flashed all in a moment to Kate's mind, that the lady must be sufficiently aware of her husband's true character,—possibly acquainted, also, with a sufficiency of his antecedents,—to enable her to make the painful surmise of what had actually taken place. Her own uneasiness was therefore wrought up to the highest: her confusion was enhanced into bewilderment. She knew not what to say: her own position was most painful. If questioned pointedly, how could she deny what had taken place?—but on the other hand, how could she admit it? To

distress this kind-hearted lady who in the space of a few minutes had shown her so much sympathy, was an alternative to which she could not easily bring herself; and yet, as she still gazed on that fearfully pale countenance, and looked into those dark eyes where an unnatural light seemed burning,—she felt convinced that the injured and outraged wife had indeed but too well conjectured what had passed at the interview between herself and the Minister.

"Miss Marshall," said the lady, resuming her seat, and making an evidently powerful endeavour to subdue her emotions, "you have not told me all: but I again thank you for having suppressed that which you have left unexplained. Ah! it was not without reason I involuntarily observed just now *that you too are unhappy*,—meaning thereby that in such unhappiness there was perhaps too much cause for the existence of sympathy between us."

"Lady," answered Kate, in a voice deeply compassionating this avowal of affliction on the part of the Minister's wife,—"if for a moment my presence beneath this roof should have led to aught that has given you pain, most sincerely and deeply do I regret it. You have shown me so much kind sympathy—and sympathy to one in my position is so sweet—that not for worlds could I find it in my heart to be the source of annoyance. Let me go, madam!—I will take elsewhere the burden of my own sorrows——"

"Miss Marshall," interrupted the Minister's wife, "there is something savouring of reproachfulness in your tone, your look, and your manner. Ah! if a doubt had previously remained in my mind, it would now be cleared up. Yes it is indeed so! There is confirmation of my painful conjecture in every syllable you have uttered—in every glance you have flung upon me. Oh!" she cried, wringing her hands bitterly—but still she did

not weep,—"what must you think of a man who wields so much power to do good, and yet uses it so unworthily? Oh, what must you think, I say?—what must you think? Alas that I should have been compelled to speak thus openly and plainly in your presence: but I see how it has been. *You* too have experienced an outrageous proposal from that man whose conduct fills me with shame, as it causes my unhappiness,—that man nevertheless whom I love so devotedly and so well! Oh, if my dear friend Constance"—thus alluding to the Marchioness of Villebelle—"knew that I am unhappy, and suspected the cause——But no!" she interrupted herself vehemently: "heaven forbid that it should be suspected at all——heaven in mercy forbid!"

The unfortunate lady became convulsed with grief—or rather desisted from her impassioned outpourings through the augmenting paroxysms of that rending anguish; and Kate Marshall, forgetting whatsoever difference of rank there might be between them, took both her hands—pressed them warmly in her own—and besought her to be comforted. The gush of mental agonies was too violent to last long; and when its sweeping fury had passed away—or at least had yielded somewhat to a lull—the Minister's wife caressingly acknowledged the display of Miss Marshall's sympathy; and after a brief pause went on speaking.

"Circumstances," she said, "have led me into revelations to your ears which have never been breathed even to my mother or father—much less to friends or acquaintances. No: the pride of a woman has prevented *that*,—the pride of a Castilian too! Were I ill-looking, unaccomplished, and coarse in manners, I might complain of a husband's neglect—because, in *that* case, I should not be sustained by a proper pride above the meanness of complaining. It is however different. My glass tells me that I am not ugly: a retrospect over the educational training through which I have passed, convinces me that I cannot altogether be devoid of mental attractions; and the adulation which I receive in society, forbids the notion that my manners are repulsive. Therefore have I the conviction that I am a woman to be loved: and for the same reason my pride prevents me from suffering the world to know that I have not the power of fascinating my husband's heart. But I will tell you more, Miss Marshall. When four years ago I first formed his acquaintance, he was a poor, unknown, struggling advocate at the bar. We were married—and the dower which I brought him, though small, was nevertheless the foundation of his fortune. Therewith he established the journal which became such a power amongst the press—a power too amongst the people. It procured him a seat in the Chamber of Deputies; and thence the transition was by no means difficult to the elevated post of a Minister. To me he owes everything: my recompense is—nothing! worse than nothing—it is neglect! For three years has our married life lasted: for two years we have occupied separate chambers;—yes, for two years we have been only as friends dwelling beneath the same roof. There has been as much alienation between us—or rather on *his* part towards *me*—as if no nuptial vows had ever been pronounced. It may seem singular to you, Miss Marshall, that within the first hour of our acquaintance, I tell you all this: but it is because circumstances have led me into the revelation——And besides," added the Minister's wife, suddenly looking as if she were ashamed and confused, "there is a project in my mind which may serve the purposes of us both."

"Serve mine?" ejaculated Kate, eagerly catching, like a drowning creature, at any straw. "Do you mean that there is hope of saving the life of him I love?"

"Hope? Yes—every hope!" responded the lady. "But only if you will be guided by me."

"Guided by you?" exclaimed Miss Marshall: "you are an angel sent to raise me up from despair! Oh, you have but to speak—to give me your instructions—to tell me what to do—and I will follow your counsel in all things!"

"Patience for a moment," said the lady; "and let me first understand you beyond the possibility of mistake. Deal frankly with me: think not of wounding my feelings by any painful disclosures: it is absolutely necessary that I should learn everything which passed between my husband and yourself."

"Do you indeed insist upon such full and complete revelations?" asked Kate.

"I do," responded the Minister's wife. "Again I say, tell me everything! The success of the project which I have in my mind, depends upon the accuracy with which you give me these details. Alas! did you not perceive that I only conjectured them but too well almost from the beginning? You are not the first, Miss Marshall, to whom my husband has made such proposals: you are not the first to whom he has offered to sell that mercy which on no other condition would he vouchsafe! But you are one of the few who have had the honour, the spirit, and the rectitude to scorn and disdain the proposition. Oh! you know not how I love my husband, notwithstanding all his faults: and if I could but wean him back to my arms——But I am wasting time. Pray give me your explanations."

Kate Marshall,—perceiving that the Minister's wife was firmly resolute in hearing these disclosures, and that they connected themselves with the plan she was revolving in her mind,—no longer hesitated to acquiesce in her demand. She accordingly entered upon a narrative of those particulars of her interview with the Minister which are already known to the reader: but inasmuch as she appeared disposed to glance at them more lightly than was consistent with minuteness of detail, in order to avoid as much as possible shocking the outraged wife,—the latter was compelled to question her closely to elicit the fullest particulars. Ultimately every tittle was revealed,—not even to the omission of the insolent prophecy thrown out by the Minister, to the effect that within the week which was passing Kate would return to him.

"Now I know all," said the Minister's wife, in a mournful voice: for she could not be otherwise than shocked at the cold-blooded cruelty and refined villany of her husband's conduct: but speedily brightening up again, with the hope which was encouraged by the project then in her mind, she said, "Now, Miss Marshall, I will explain to you the course which is to be followed——the only course whereby you can save your lover from an otherwise certain death!"

The Minister's wife and Kate Marshall remained together for nearly an hour longer in deep and earnest discourse: but what the nature of it was, need not now be particularized. Suffice it to say, that Kate took her departure with hope in her bosom; and on returning to the hotel, she gave the landlady to understand that she had experienced no unfavourable reception at the hands of the Minister of the Interior and his wife—but that a definite answer could not be given to her prayer for three or four days to come.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

THE APPOINTMENT.

It was on the fourth morning after the interviews with the Minister and his wife,—and consequently verging towards the end of the week, within the limit of which it was so vitally necessary to adopt a decisive measure on behalf of Ned Russell,—that Kate Marshall again apparelled herself in her handsomest costume. She expended a considerable time over her toilet,—paying the minutest attention to every detail, and studying to render herself as attractive as possible. No doubt she felt that there was something meretricious in all this: but the image of her beloved was uppermost in her mind,—she was doing it for his sake—and this was her consolation. Her heart too beat high with hope; and this inward excitement gave a rich carnation bloom to her countenance. Never had Kate Marshall appeared to greater advantage: never had her handsome countenance looked handsomer—never were the rich contours of her shape more admirably displayed by the aids of apparel.

It was bordering upon noon, when, having finished this careful toilet, Miss Marshall entered a hired vehicle, and was driven to the private dwelling of the Minister of the Interior. This house, as already intimated—and like many of the mansions at Madrid—had two entrances. One was considered the private means of access to the family compartment: the other communicated with the official rooms of the Minister himself: for we should have observed that although he transacted his principal business at the Ministry of the Interior, he nevertheless received, at a certain hour, applicants and visitors at his own private residence. Perhaps he had more motives than one in adopting this course: it might be that there were certain matters which he could conduct with greater privacy at his own abode than at the building officially devoted to the department over which he presided.

It was at the entrance to the Minister's apartments that the vehicle which bore Kate, stopped to set her down, as on the preceding occasion. She was conducted up to the waiting-room: several other persons were there assembled;—but almost immediately after her arrival, she was desired by the usher to follow him into the Minister's presence. It was evident therefore that this usher had received his instructions how to act in case Miss Marshall should call again. The colour was heightened upon her cheeks as she followed the official into the same cabinet where she had before seen the Minister of the Interior; and on entering that apartment, she observed that he was now alone,—the secretary having been doubtless ordered to withdraw. The Minister endeavoured to maintain a cold reserve of manner,—as if he did not choose to show too much pleasure at the fulfilment of his prophecy. At the re-appearance of Miss Marshall, nevertheless, the gradual flushing of his previously pale cheeks, and the fiercer burning of his dark eyes, denoted but too plainly the flaming-up of the devouring desires which her presence had on the former occasion excited within him. Bowing with a distant courtesy, he motioned Kate to a seat—and resumed his own, from which he had risen on her entrance.

"Your prophecy is fulfilled, sir," said Kate, speaking in a low but firm voice. "I am here once more."

"But have you been mindful of the warning I gave?" demanded the Minister, his eyes travelling slowly and with gloating eagerness over her entire form: "have you borne in mind the assurances I so emphatically held out, that it would be useless to have recourse anew to intercession and entreaty—to threat or upbraiding?"

"I have borne all this in mind," answered Kate, her looks sinking beneath the devouring gaze of the libertine Minister.

"Then I am to understand, Miss Marshall," he went on to say, "that you have consented to my proposition?"

"I am resolved to save at any price the life of him whom I love:"—and still Kate spoke in a low but firm tone.

"It is well—and your decision is a wise one," said the Minister, every feature of his countenance being expressive of the inward exultation that filled his heart. "Doubtless you reflected that the period of delay is drawing to a close—and that to-morrow,—or the day after to-morrow *at latest*, the order for your lover's pardon should be transmitted to the Captain-General of Catalonia?"

"Such has been my reflection," rejoined Kate: "and to ensure the transmission of that pardon, have I returned to fulfil your prophecy."

"Then listen!" said the Minister, as he now approached Kate; and taking her hand, he bent towards her—so that his breath, hot with the fever of desire, played upon her cheek. "This night, as the clocks proclaim the hour of ten, must you be with me. No one need mark your arrival: no one shall be nigh to observe your approach. I will give you the key of that door at the entrance —— In short, everything shall be managed with a becoming delicacy."

"I expect as much at your hands, sir," answered Kate: "for heaven knows that if the shame and dishonour which I am this night to encounter, became whispered abroad in the world, it would drive me to despair and to self-destruction!"

"Fear nothing!" quickly answered the Minister, who was almost maddened by that close survey of Kate's countenance,—a survey which showed him that she was still in all the freshness of her charms—that no artificial colour lent the hue of the rose to her cheeks: while at the same time he could drink in the breath that was pure and balmy as the gentle breeze of a Spring morning. "Fear nothing," he repeated. "You have but to hint at any other arrangements—and they shall be adopted.

All that I require is the faithful keeping of the appointment: I care not for the circumstances under which it may be kept, so long as you will be mine!"

"Can you not understand," asked Kate, averting her blushing countenance, "that henceforth I can never look you in the face again?——Already am I overcome with shame and confusion——"

"And wherefore, beloved one?" asked the Minister: and he endeavoured to imprint a kiss upon one of those glowing cheeks: but she quickly repulsed him, starting up from her seat at the same time.

"No! no!" she cried: "not now! not now! Have I not assured you that I am already overcome with shame? Spare me, I beseech you!"

"I will," he answered: "because to-night you will be mine—altogether mine! But you will not come cold and inanimate—coy and reluctant—to my arms? It must not be a marble statue that I am to enfold in my embrace. No: you must come glowing with passion and with ardour——"

"Speak not thus—speak not thus!" interrupted Kate, trembling—perhaps shuddering from head to foot. "Oh, there is something shocking in the idea of talking thus in the broad daylight, when the sun is shining! But to-night—when darkness shall be upon the face of the earth—and when in the midst of darkness also I shall meet you,——*then* it may be different! *then*, perhaps, the plunge being resolved upon, I shall more than resign myself to my fate——"

"Oh, I understand you—I understand you!" exclaimed the libidinous Minister, literally trembling with the ardour of his passion. "You will be all that I require? But what meant you by those words you have just spoken—*that in the midst of darkness we shall meet?*"

"I mean this," answered Kate, still speaking with averted looks, and with a countenance crimsoned up to the very hair of her head: "that inasmuch as I never again can look you in the face without dying of shame—and inasmuch as you have promised that whatsoever arrangement may be suggested to spare my feelings, shall be carried out—I have to stipulate that the only condition on which I will come, is to the effect that we *do* meet in darkness; and that for the hour which I shall remain with you, your Excellency swears as a man of honour—by everything sacred in heaven, and in fear of everything terrible in Satan's kingdom—that you will not attempt to kindle lamp nor candle for the purpose of looking me in the face."

"No, no: I will not do it!" answered the Minister. "I will obey your behest in all things."

"You swear?" demanded Kate.

"I swear," responded the Minister.

"You swear," she repeated, "as solemnly and as fearfully as I ere now indicated?"

"I swear by all my hopes of hereafter!" was the rejoinder vehemently given.

"And understand me well," continued Kate, still speaking with averted looks—and still too with cheeks of peony-redness,—"there is something still more coercive than an oath——"

"What mean you?" demanded the Spaniard hastily.

"I mean this," was the quick reply: "that if you attempt to violate that oath which you have sworn, a dagger which I shall have with me——"

"A dagger?" ejaculated the Minister, who was in his soul a coward.

"Yes—a dagger!" responded Kate. "But not to drink your heart's blood! I am no murderess——no, not even to avenge such an outrage as that would be! But inasmuch as, if after having surrendered my honour up to you, it would be shame goading me to madness to look you in the face—and as death would be preferable to such shame,—that dagger which is to accompany me, shall be plunged deep down into my own bosom if you were to attempt to violate your oath. *Then* your Excellency would have to account to the world as best you could, for the tragedy thus occurring in the privacy of your own chamber."

"Fear not, beauteous creature," responded the Minister, "that there will be need for such a frightful catastrophe. No, no: my imagination will depict the loveliness of your countenance, as it is already impressed upon my memory. Be it therefore as you say: we will meet in the darkness—we will continue in darkness—we will part in darkness likewise."

"And the decree of pardon," added Kate, "will be already drawn up—your signature will be attached thereto? You will have the document in readiness for me this night?"

"Fear not! all shall be done as you wish," replied the Spaniard.

"And now, one word more!" continued Kate: "for all this has a business-like regularity that must not be lost sight of. Your Excellency perceives that I trust entirely to your honour in faithfully placing in my hands the pardon for which I am to make so great a sacrifice. There is in our English history a terrible tale, of a certain Colonel Kirke, who obtained possession of a young damsel's virtue under circumstances somewhat similar to these which are taking place now, —with this difference, however, that it was the girl's brother, and not her lover, for whom she sacrificed herself to that pitiless soldier-judge. It is however recorded that Kirke—a vile traitor to his pledge, and inspired with the cruelty of a fiend—opened his casement in the morning, and showed the dishonoured sister the corpse of her brother suspended to a tree at a little distance. Now, your Excellency must understand me well——"

"What! do you believe me capable of such diabolic perfidy as that?" ejaculated the Minister.

"I have a right to guard against it," responded Kate, calmly and firmly. "Give me now a written acknowledgment signed by your own hand —sealed with your own seal,—an acknowledgment which I shall bear away with me,—that on certain conditions to be fulfilled to-night, the full and complete pardon of Edward Russell is to be placed in my possession. To-morrow I will remit you, by messenger or post, the acknowledgment you are about to sign."

"Ah! but you will use it to wreak a vengeance upon me?" cried the Minister, almost astounded at the demand.

"Think you that if I gain my end—namely, the salvation of my lover," asked Kate,—"I shall be willing to take a step which by giving publicity to the whole dread and infamous trans-

action, would make known my shame to the world? No, sir: I should be but too anxious for the secret to be religiously kept. But if, on the other hand, you deceive me in respect to the pardon—*then* should I scatter all other considerations to the wind; and the idea of vengeance becoming paramount, I should proclaim all my wrongs—because when once that vengeance had been wreaked, I myself should have no longer a single tie to bind me to existence. I should perish—and in self-destruction throw off the coil of shame!"

The Minister of the Interior perceived nothing unreasonable in all this: on the contrary, he merely beheld therein the natural precaution which a woman was likely to take when having to deal with a person of unscrupulous character. For his Excellency knew full well that such *was* his character—and that in such a light it must be viewed by Miss Marshall. But on this score he was altogether indifferent; he considered himself to have risen by his own talents and intrigues high above the opinion of the world at large—and consequently to place him in total independence of the opinion of an individual. He was infatuated with Miss Marshall's beauty:—possessed of the strongest passions, he was excited to a more than ordinary degree by her handsome countenance and her fine shape: he longed to clasp her in his arms—yearned with avidity to make her his own. Therefore it was without any farther hesitation that he yielded to what he regarded as a mere precaution on her part; and seating himself at the desk, he penned in the English language precisely such a document as she had suggested,—appending his signature, and affixing the ministerial seal of the Home Department.

"One single embrace ere you leave me, Miss Marshall!" he said, as he presented the paper; and he made a movement to suit the action to the word.

"No, sir—not now!" she emphatically exclaimed, retreating a couple of paces. "I am no brazen-face that can thus calmly and deliberately surrender myself to the arms of a stranger. Understand me well, sir!" she continued, again with averted countenance, and with that crimsoning of the cheeks which showed how revolting it was unto the sensitive delicacy of her feelings to be compelled thus to argue and expatiate upon such a subject: "understand me well, sir! I am pure and chaste: it is no meretricious female whom you are thus wooing by coercion instead of by sentiment; and again do I repeat that in the broad daylight, with the sun shining, I cannot look you in the face and think of all that is to be consummated. This night, punctually as the clocks at Madrid proclaim the hour of ten, shall I keep the appointment which has been made."

With these words Kate Marshall, having secured the document in her bosom, moved towards the door; and the Minister of the Interior sought not to detain her—sought not even so much as to touch her hand again. That door closed behind her; and when he was once more alone, he gloated over the idea that within a few hours thence, the superb creature who had just quitted his presence, would be his own—abandoned completely unto him—clasped in his arms!

Kate returned to the hotel; and in the course of the afternoon, a lady—wearing the graceful Spanish mantilla, which completely concealed her countenance—called upon her at that hostelry. They were closeted together for nearly an hour; and then the visitress took her leave,—departing on foot as she had come, and with the mantilla completely hiding her features, so that she could not possibly be recognised by any one belonging to the establishment. This lady was the wife of the Minister of the Interior: but wherefore had she thus stealthily sought an interview with Kate? This question will be speedily answered by the incidents which we are about to record.

The hours passed—evening came—the dusk set in—and at length the iron tongue of Time proclaimed the moment of the appointment which Miss Marshall had consented to keep with the Minister of the Interior. This functionary had given an intimation to his domestics that they were to be out of the way so far as his own private suite of apartments was concerned; and they, comprehending full well that their master had in hand one of his wonted affairs of gallantry, took the hint and were careful to obey it. Faithful to his promise to Kate Marshall, he extinguished the lights in the vestibule—on the staircase—in the spacious landing to which that staircase led,—everywhere, in short, from the entrance-door to that of his own chamber—and within the chamber itself likewise. He was apparelled in a dressing-gown—his feet were thrust into slippers: his heart was beating with the excitement of his passions—for his fervid imagination was enabled to define and delineate all the contours of that shape which the dress of his intended victim had concealed, although to a certain extent developing them. He thought to himself that the moment was now at hand which was to give him one of those rewards for which he had laboured, and toiled, and intrigued; inasmuch as he regarded the possession of power, not merely as a crowning triumph of his ambition, but likewise as the means of gratifying his insatiate lust for pleasure.

It was, as we have said, ten o'clock—and already for at least five minutes had the licentious Minister been waiting in the vestibule,—waiting there in the darkness for the arrival of her whom he expected. Nor was he kept long in suspense. The bell at the entrance rang: he flew to open the door—and a female form, closely veiled, passed into the vestibule.

"Beauteous creature, I thank thee," exclaimed the impassioned Minister, "for thus punctually keeping the appointment of love!"—and now feeling that he had a right to consider her his own, shrouded in the darkness as they were, and all arrangements being made by him in faithful compliance with Kate Marshall's stipulations,—he tore up the veil, and straining her in his arms, pressed his lips to her's. "Now," he said, "let me lead you hence."

She had spoken not a word: she appeared to have surrendered herself like a willing victim to his embrace. She accompanied him up the stairs: the landing was crossed—the chamber was entered.

For obvious reasons we must pass with some degree of haste over this scene. Suffice it to say that half-an-hour had elapsed from the moment that the Minister of the Interior had conducted

the female to his chamber,—when he exclaimed, in the English tongue, "By heaven, there is some mystery in all this! You answer my impassioned language in monosyllables—and these lowly murmured! A suspicion—yes, a suspicion has flashed to my mind——No! it has been growing and growing for some minutes past——now it is confirmed——By heaven, I will be satisfied!"

"Remember your solemn pledge, sir," whispered a female voice, in the darkness of that chamber, and also speaking in English,—"there is to be no light!"

"Ah, this voice!" ejaculated the Minister, full of wildering astonishment and affright: "it is not that of her whom I expected——though feigned, I know that it is not! It has not her accents ——I am deceived——But, by the living God, I will clear up the mystery!"

"Remember, sir—the dagger——"

"Away with all considerations!" cried the almost infuriate man. "At any risk——"

"Then the consequences be upon your own head," again murmured that female voice. "It is I who promised to meet you—it is I who have abandoned myself to you——Give me the pardon, and suffer me to depart!"

The Minister had remained perfectly still, and listening breathlessly to her words as she thus spoke: for he sought, with all the keenness of the sense of hearing, to discover whether it were really Kate Marshall's voice or another.

"No, no—I am deceived!" he ejaculated, now speaking in his own native tongue. "There is something startling in all this!"

He rushed to the chimney-piece, where there were materials ready for striking a light. His female companion endeavoured not to prevent him from using those materials: she doubtless thought that such an attempt would be vain, and might only lead to the exercise of violence towards herself, and to the disturbance of the household. Therefore in a few moments a light sprang into existence in the room: but not more quickly blazed up that flame, than did the eyes of the Minister glance upon the female—and he beheld his own wife!

"Madam," he said, becoming composed and calm all in a moment, and speaking in a cold stern voice,—"I will not pretend to declare that you are not justified in the course you have pursued. But on *my* side I have now only one alternative to adopt."

Thus speaking, he took from a side-table a sealed packet, containing the pardon of Edward Russell; and deliberately tearing it in halves, he set fire to it by the wax-candle which he had lighted. He watched the fragments until they were consumed: the baffled, disappointed, and even humiliated wife watched them also. Then, as the last sparks were expiring one after the other on the blackened tinder, the unhappy lady heaved a profound sigh; and tears trickled down her cheeks as she thought of what would now be the feelings of poor Kate Marshall. But as a recollection suddenly flashed to her mind, she accosted her husband; and looking him with earnest significancy in the countenance, said, "Miss Marshall has an acknowledgment signed by your own hand—sealed with the Ministerial signet—to the effect that the pardon of Edward Russell is to be presented to her!"

"On certain conditions," responded the Minister, coldly,—"which have not been fulfilled."

"But that acknowledgment," quickly exclaimed his wife, "will prove your ruin! it will serve as the corroboration of the tale which she will tell——"

"No," interrupted the Minister; "it will have none of these effects:"—and he pulled the cord of the bell with some degree of violence.

"What would you do? what intention have you?" demanded his wife, seized with consternation.

"Listen to the orders I shall give," rejoined her husband, still in that same cold, stern, implacable voice; "and you will hear."

The bell which he had just pulled, rang in the chamber of a valet who slept overhead. Scarcely had the Minister given that response to his wife, when a knock was heard at the door of the apartment; and the Minister, partly opening the door, addressed his valet thus:—

"Hasten and take with you a sufficient number of the police for the arrest of a woman,—this woman being a resolute and determined one. Lose no time in repairing to the hotel where she resides:"—and he named it. "Let no mercy be shown her! let no delay take place! See that she communicates not with a single individual belonging to the establishment. It is of equal importance that all papers in her possession should be secured on the spot—sealed up—and brought to me. Let every nook and corner—every possible crevice of concealment—be thoroughly searched and examined: for this is a dangerous woman—a spy in the pay of the Carlists—and she has important documents with her. Her name is Catherine Marshall: England is her native country. Now depart;—and at the expiration of an hour at the farthest, I shall expect that you knock at this door to announce that the arrest is effected, and to place in my hands the sealed packet containing all the papers found in the woman's room. Stop!—one word more! When conveyed to gaol, let her be placed in a cell by herself; and see that some trustworthy individual be appointed as the turnkey."

Having issued these instructions, the Minister of the Interior abruptly closed the door of the chamber; and as his eyes again settled upon his wife, he saw that she was pale, trembling—the picture of grief and despair.

"For heaven's sake, consummate not this stupendous injustice!" cried the unhappy lady, flinging herself at the Minister's feet. "Oh, do not, I implore you! Avenge not upon her whatsoever rancour you may cherish against me! It was I who devised the project—it was I who counselled her how to act——"

"How came you to form her acquaintance?" demanded the husband, folding his arms across his chest, and looking down in cold severity upon that wife who still knelt at his feet, and whom he bade not arise from her suppliant posture.

"She brought me a letter from the Marchioness de Villebelle. That letter I can show you. It was on the same day when she had a first interview with you——Oh! in mercy spare her! Send and revoke the order ere it be too late! I will pledge my existence that no evil use shall be made of the written promise you have given——

In mercy spare her, I conjure you!" and the unhappy lady extended her clasped hands in anguished entreaty towards her husband.

But cold and pitiless, he continued to gaze down upon her: he was moved not by her beauty nor her tears: he seemed not to reflect that in atonement for the monstrous injustice he had done towards her who was his wife, he was bound to confer any boon which she might demand. There, in semi-nudity, she knelt: there, clad only in the lightest drapery, was she, a suppliant at his feet —and he still remorseless and implacable!

"But wherefore," he demanded, "did you leave several days to elapse ere this project of your's, to which she became an accomplice, was put into execution?"

"Oh, because it was deemed more prudent to allow that interval to pass, so that it might appear as if she procrastinated the dread alternative until almost the latest moment——"

"I understand," interrupted the Minister, a scornful smile appearing upon his lips. "It was indeed a stratagem altogether well worthy of woman's ingenuity,—a stratagem whereby two purposes were to be served: she to obtain the pardon of her lover—you to win back a neglectful husband to your arms. And pray, madam, was it your intent to keep this secret all to yourself?"

"No," she answered, suddenly rising to her feet, and assuming a firmer look. "To-morrow, after having placed the pardon in the young woman's hands, I should have come to you—I should have thrown myself at your feet, where I have now been so vainly kneeling—I should have confessed everything—I should have besought you to take compassion upon me, and to consider that the course I had adopted was not merely to save a virtuous and unhappy foreigner from the chance of succumbing to a foul wrong as the only alternative of rescuing her lover,—but likewise as a proof of the affection, undiminished, and undying, which I entertain for you! Oh, will you not be merciful?——do what you will with me, but spare that unhappy creature?"

"It is impossible," responded the husband: "the order has gone forth—it is too late! And now, madam," he added, with another scornful smile, "since you have thus contrived to obtain access to my chamber, it suits me that you should remain here for the present,—inasmuch as I will not conceal from you my apprehension that if left at liberty, you would speed to the hotel in the hope of anticipating the visit of the police."

"And is it thus that you address your own wife?" exclaimed the wretched lady: then, as her eyes suddenly flashed fire, and her form appeared to dilate with the inspiration of indignant pride, she exclaimed, "But enough of this humiliation for me! You have committed the foulest outrage which a husband can perpetrate towards a wife: you stand before me under circumstances which render your purposed infidelity undeniable;—and not one word of regret—not one symptom of remorse has passed your lips! You take the highest ground—that ground which I myself ought to occupy!—you treat me as if I were the offender,—whereas it is you yourself who are the criminal! But I will bear patiently with my wrongs no more. Have you forgotten, sir, that Spanish blood flows in my veins—that a true Castilian vengeance can animate my soul?"

"Madam," answered the Minister coldly, "if you think that you have it in your power to ruin me, make the attempt. If it succeed, you pull down an edifice over your own head as well as over mine: if you fail, you will only widen the distance which of late has subsisted between us."

The unhappy lady saw but too keenly and felt but too forcibly the truth of these observations; and flinging herself upon the couch, she gave way to a passionate outburst of grief.

At the expiration of the hour, there was a knock at the door of that chamber; and the Minister hastened to receive the tidings which his valet brought. He passed out upon the landing; and the unfortunate lady heard the domestic speak thus:—

"Your Excellency's commands are obeyed to the very letter: the English woman, bearing the name of Catherine Marshall, is in prison—and this packet contains the few papers which were found in her possession."

"Good!" responded the Minister: and re-entering the chamber, he closed the door.

Then, tearing open the packet, he examined the papers one after the other: but his looks altered visibly to the keen watching eye of his wife, when he found that the written promise given to Kate Marshall, was not amongst them. This was an event for which he was but little prepared: he had felt confident the acknowledgment would be amongst those documents—but it was not! The case was dangerous—critical: that acknowledgment was in his own handwriting—bore his own signature—and was invested with all the formal sanctity which the Ministerial seal could bestow.

"You perceive," said his wife, more in anguish than reproach, "that you have woven a web which is closing around you—alas, I fear to your utter ruin!"

The Minister gave no immediate response—but stood gazing upon the papers with looks of sombre moodiness. His wife continued to watch his countenance with painful anxiety: she knew that the circumstances must be perilous and threatening indeed, when they could make this deep impression upon such a man as her husband.

"You can save me!" he suddenly exclaimed, approaching the couch on which she reclined, her arm supporting her head.

"Oh, if I could!" she cried with an expression of joy, and hope, and love appearing upon her features: "it would be the happiest moment of my life—because perhaps you would in that case give me back some portion of your heart?"

"Yes," quickly responded her husband, whose soul, indurated though it were, was touched by all these evidences of that truly noble-minded woman's devoted attachment, and who could not help feeling that this prompt anxiety on her part to succour him in his embarrassment, was far more than he deserved after all the abominable infamy of his conduct:—"yes, I have indeed treated you too harshly! I were the veriest wretch upon earth if I did not appreciate so much goodness!"—then in a voice rendered tremulous with the conflicting emotions which such a variety of circumstances had excited within him, he went on to say, "I cannot blind myself to the fact—I do not hesitate

to admit—that I stand upon the very verge of ruin. Ah, cursed folly that has brought me to this extremity!"

"My dearest husband," said the noble-hearted Spanish woman, seizing his hands and pressing them to her bosom, "tell me what I can do to serve you."

"I am about to ask you much," quickly responded the Minister: but then, as a sudden thought struck him, he exclaimed, "Oh! you must know what Miss Marshall has done with that document? She acted under your advice——"

"Think you," interrupted the lady with a reproachful look, "that I should have left you thus in suspense, had I really known how she has disposed of the paper? No—on my soul, I am ignorant on the subject! I saw her this afternoon; and she acquainted me with all that had taken place between herself and you in the morning: she even showed me that paper—but I neither counselled her to make any special use of it, nor did she intimate that such was her intention. So far from myself having the knowledge that she thought of parting with it, it was a portion of my plan to obtain it from her on the morrow, when placing the pardon in her hands; and I should have come, as I ere now said, to throw myself at your feet—to reveal everything—and to restore to you this very written promise whereof we are speaking."

The lady spoke with such a voice and with such looks of completest sincerity, that it was impossible for her husband to doubt the truth of her averments.

"I believe you," he said: "what right indeed have I to doubt you—you who are exhibiting a kindness and an affection towards me which I so little deserve!"

"And the service I can render you?" asked the wife anxiously. "Methinks I can anticipate what you would say."

"At an early hour in the morning," responded the Minister, "you must repair——"

"This night!—now, if you will!" exclaimed the lady. "I know what you mean: you would have me visit Miss Marshall in her prison——But, Ah! my dear husband, you have still the power to make some atonement—and rest assured you will not be a loser thereby! Sign the order for this young woman's release: let me be the bearer of it to the gaol—and I stake my existence upon the promise I now make,—which is, that I will save you if it be yet possible to recall whatsoever course Miss Marshall may have taken!"

It was still more impossible than at first for the Minister to remain insensible to the generous conduct of his wife. That heart which for nearly two years had remained so hardened against her, was melted. He would have been the vilest, the most detestable, and the most brutal of wretches were it otherwise: but unprincipled though he were, he was not so bad as all this. He seized his wife's hand—he carried it to his lips—and as she wound her arms about his neck, he clasped her to his breast.

"Admirable woman!" he exclaimed, "you have taught me a lesson this night which I cannot possibly forget! Whatsoever may be the result of these threatening circumstances, I shall not remain unmindful of your noble generosity. No—I shall not! Wicked and unscrupulous I have been! Not for an instant do I attempt to palliate my conduct: but I may atone for it—yes, I may atone for it; and that atonement shall be made. I will now follow your advice in all things. You say that you will proceed this night——"

"To the prison?" exclaimed the lady. "Yes—at once! Lose not a moment in writing an order for the discharge of Miss Marshall: within an hour or two she may be back at the hotel—and the circumstance need not obtain publicity."

While thus speaking, the Minister's wife had begun to re-apparel herself hastily; and he, taking writing materials which were in the room, sat down and penned the document wherewith she had enjoined him to entrust her.

"But is not Miss Marshall herself," he suddenly asked, "playing you false——I mean by the disposal of that written promise without your knowledge——"

"Let us not judge her hastily," interrupted the lady. "She may have secured it in some place where it has escaped the notice of the searchers. This is indeed most probable: for brief as my acquaintance has been with her, I have nevertheless obtained a sufficient insight into her disposition to feel assured that she would do naught to injure you, the effects of which should redound upon myself. I am now about to issue forth: I will repair to the prison——But you empower me to promise Miss Marshall that her lover's pardon shall be forwarded to her in the morning?"

"The matter is in your hands," answered the Minister: "use your own discretion—adopt the course which may appear best. Fear not that I shall repudiate your actions!"

He again embraced his wife; and drawing her veil closely over her countenance, the magnanimous lady issued forth into the streets of Madrid.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

THE GAOL.

It was soon after eleven o'clock on the eventful night of which we are speaking, that Kate Marshall's chamber at the hotel was suddenly invaded by the Minister's valet, followed by three officers of the Secret Police in plain clothes. Kate had not retired to rest: nor indeed had she even begun to disapparel herself. Her mind was too much agitated with suspense as to the issue of the stratagem, to permit her to seek her pillow. She was therefore sitting up,—endeavouring to concentrate her attention upon one of the books which she had brought with her from Dover: but she constantly lost the thread of what she attempted to read; and found her thoughts wandering to far different subjects. Although in respect to the written promise received from the Minister of the Interior, she had adopted a particular course—yet she could not satisfy herself that even this precaution would guard against the effects of his anger or the insidiousness of his treachery, should he discover that instead of the victim whom he expected, it was his own wife whom he was clasping in his arms. Thus, when the chamber was abruptly invaded by the valet and the policemen, Kate comprehended but too

well that the stratagem was detected; and she was naturally smitten with the fear that all was lost. No—not quite *all*: for still there was the chance that some good might result from the manner in which she had disposed of the acknowledgment; and this idea was faintly—but only faintly—cheering for Miss Marshall.

The reader has seen enough of her to be aware that she was by no means deficient in courage; and though the shock produced by the sudden entry of those four men at this time of the night, was naturally great, she speedily recovered her presence of mind. She was however subjected to the grossest and most indelicate treatment on the part of the ruffians who now held her captive. They insisted upon searching with their own hands the pockets of her garments; and while two of the officers forcibly held her arms, the valet actually plunged his hand into her bosom, to ascertain if she had any papers concealed there. Crimson with indignation, and her eyes flashing fire, Kate Marshall with an almost preterhuman effort disengaged herself from the gripe of those ruffians; and snatching up one of the candlesticks, hurled it with such force at the insolent valet, that if it had struck him on the head, he never would perhaps have had another chance of practising such dastard conduct in this world: but he stepped nimbly aside, and it fell at the farther extremity of the room. Her trunk was then minutely searched—her garments were tossed out upon the floor: the inspection was most minute but all that the ruffians could discover, consisted of a few of Ned Russell's letters which he had written to her at different times, and which she had brought with her for re-perusal:—because what young woman who loves, is ever unaccompanied by the tender epistles of him to whom her heart is devoted? The search was extended to the bed in the chamber—to the drawers—indeed to every nook where anything might be concealed: but nothing more was discovered, beyond the letters referred to. These were duly sealed up, and taken possession of by the valet, in accordance with the positive instructions he had received from his master.

While the search was being prosecuted, Kate Marshall stood looking on with indignation still depicted upon her countenance: but she spoke not a word—because she was unable to make herself understood by the Spaniards; and even if it were otherwise, she was too full of wrathful pride and a sense of outraged modesty to deign even a syllable of remonstrance or rebuke in respect to such brutal ruffians. When the search was over, they made her a sign to put on her bonnet and shawl; and this being done, she was hurried down stairs to a vehicle waiting at the entrance of the hotel. She encountered not a soul belonging to the establishment;—not even the kind-hearted landlady was nigh to bestow upon her a look of compassion: and therefore Kate full well understood that the seclusion of the inmates of the hotel in their own chambers, while all these things were taking place, must be in pursuance of a strict mandate issued by the police officials to that effect. She likewise comprehended that she was being borne to gaol: for whither else could she be thus dragged away at that time of the night?

And it was so. In a quarter of an hour the vehicle reached the gate of the gloomy prison; and when the officials thereof were summoned, the valet gave whispered instructions relative to the consignment of Miss Marshall to a solitary cell. In a few minutes she was alone in that dungeon: for all the appearance of a dungeon had it, though not underground. It was a small chamber, surrounded with walls of massive masonry but too well calculated to beat back any cries of anguish which might issue from the lips of a captive imprisoned there. There was no window in those walls; and the air was only admitted by a narrow grating in the huge door. An iron bedstead, with mean and sordid bedding—a table—a chair—a bason and ewer, these constituted the furniture of the place. The turnkey, who conducted Miss Marshall thither, took away the light,—locking and bolting the door behind him; and thus was she left in the depth of darkness and to the companionship of her own sad thoughts.

Still her presence of mind did not forsake her. Arbitrary as was the treatment to which she thus found herself subjected, yet she knew full well that even in a country where such things could be done, this same tyrannous power might not be stretched to such a length as to take her life secretly—nor publicly without some form of trial. She likewise reflected that the wife of the Minister of the Interior would most probably seek some means of befriending her; and she moreover knew that the course she had adopted in respect to the Minister's written undertaking, would be certain to lead to inquiries concerning her. Thus, altogether she was not without some slight consolation: but still she deeply felt the cruel treatment she was experiencing—while upon her cheeks still burnt the glow of indignation on account of the brutality of the Minister's valet.

For more than an hour she remained seated in the chair, giving way to her thoughts;—and then, without taking off her apparel, she lay down upon the bed. Sleep did not visit her eyes,—nor did she even woo it: she had no inclination for slumber. Nearly another hour passed: and it was verging towards two in the morning, when she heard footsteps advancing along the stone corridor leading to her cell. A light streamed through the grating in the door—the key turned in the lock—and the bolts were withdrawn. Suddenly a wild terror seized upon Kate Marshall. What if the unscrupulous and remorseless Minister had caused her to be brought thither that he might by force accomplish his detestable purpose? what if the hireling creatures belonging to that gaol, would wink at the atrocities committed by one so highly placed and who wielded such power either to reward or to punish? Kate started up from the wretched pallet; and the grim-looking turnkey entered with a candle, which he placed upon the table. But who was it that followed him into that cell?—to whom was it that he bowed with such profound respect, while standing aside for this person to enter? It was a female closely veiled: but by her form and stature Kate knew her at once——It was the Minister's wife!

The turnkey withdrew,—merely closing but not bolting nor locking the door behind him: the lady threw up her veil—and the next moment she and Kate were clasped in each other's arms.

"I come to save you—I come to deliver you,

Miss Marshall!" said the Minister's wife. "I tell you this at once, without making it a condition for the information I seek. I would not insult you so unwarrantably as to adopt such a course——"

"Ah, my dear madam!" exclaimed Kate, joy and gratitude beaming upon her countenance: "I felt assured you would not desert me—but I did not expect to receive so soon the proof of your friendship."

"It is afforded so soon as I could possibly show it," responded the lady. "You can but too well conjecture that my project failed—that all was discovered: but you will rejoice for my sake to learn that the incidents of this night have made so powerful an impression upon my husband, he has suddenly become an altered man! The proofs he has given of this better state of feeling are most important for us both. To me he has promised amendment and a renewal of his love: to you he accords immediate freedom and the pardon of your attended husband."

Kate fell upon her knees, overcome with joy; and conveying the hand of the Minister's wife to her lips, she covered it with her kisses and her tears. The lady who brought this gladdening intelligence, likewise wept. It was a touching scene—full of an exquisite pathos—as the Minister's wife, compelling Kate Marshall to rise, once more strained her in her arms.

"I cannot regret," said the lady, "anything that has taken place, inasmuch as I feel assured it has given me back a husband—and that husband an altered and better man."

"To you, dear lady," answered Kate, smiling through her tears, "is the gratitude of all the rest of my existence due——not only my gratitude, but that of him whose life is saved through your kindness. Ah! now I bethink me—you spoke of certain information which you required; and I am at no loss to conjecture what it is. My papers were seized with the idea that your husband's written undertaking would be found amongst them: and it was not. No—I sent it away for a certain purpose, which I will explain——But fear not, dear lady!—it will fall into the hands of a kind friend of mine: and no use will be made of it prejudicial to your husband's interests."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks for that assurance," answered the Minister's wife: "you have relieved my mind from an immense load. For although I felt confident you would do nothing that should in any way violate the compact which was made between us, to the effect that if your aims were accomplished through my agency, you would spare my husband from the chance of exposure,—nevertheless I feared that it might be possible for that document to fall into other hands less scrupulous and less generous than your own."

"Listen, dear lady," answered Kate, "while I give you a few words of explanation. I have already spoken to you of that Count Christoval from whom I have received so much kindness, and through whose intervention the Captain-General of Catalonia suspended the extreme sentence of the law. The Count, as you are aware, still remains at Barcelona, in order to continue his generous services until the best or the worst being known, there should no longer exist a need for them. When you left me at the hotel this afternoon, I sat down to pen a few lines to Count Christoval,—not to make him aware of what was going on, but merely to give him to understand that within a few hours the question would be decided whether Edward Russell was to be pardoned or not. It was, I can assure you, my first intention when I took up my pen, thus to confine myself to a vague and simple statement. But as I began to write, other reflections entered my mind. What if your stratagem should altogether fail? what if the Minister, exercising those terrific powers wherewith he had threatened me, should have me seized upon, even in the dead of night—hurried out of Spain—and cast upon the Portuguese or French frontier? I shuddered at the thought; and then too, by a natural association, it occurred to me that the same agents of this arbitrary power might wrest from me the written document which I held;—and that document was the only means by which, under any circumstances, I could retain a hold over your husband!"

"I understand," observed the Minister's wife: "it was indeed most natural that these reflections should force themselves upon you. But proceed: for I am in haste to conduct you away from this horrible place:"—and the lady threw her shuddering looks around the massive walls of the cell.

"Having reflected in that manner," resumed Kate, "I deeply deplored that I had not consulted you on this subject: but those ideas had not entered my head previous to your departure—and when you were gone, I did not dare seek you at your own abode, for fear that his Excellency might observe me. I therefore thought to myself that it was absolutely necessary to secure the document by some means or another—and to dispose of it in such a way that it might serve for eventual good, in case all other circumstances became adverse. I accordingly wrote the fullest details to Don Christoval,—enclosing that document in the letter. I enjoined him the strictest secrecy, should it ultimately prove unnecessary to make use of the paper:—and he is a man of honour, madam—he will not deviate one tittle from the injunctions I gave nor from the course that I laid down for him to follow. I argued to myself that, it was scarcely a breach of the compact made between yourself and me to adopt this course,—inasmuch as by your own counsel I obtained that undertaking from your husband."

"Not for a moment," responded the Minister's wife, "do I consider it a breach of the compact. Yes—I counselled you to obtain that undertaking so as to ensure the granting of the pardon by my husband: and you did well to adopt the precaution which you are describing."

"My narrative will be terminated in a few minutes," resumed Kate. "Recollecting how his Excellency had threatened to avail himself of his power to intercept my correspondence at the Post-office, I deemed that medium of conveyance to be an unsafe one for the transmission of my letter to Don Christoval. I accordingly despatched it by a mounted courier, who took his departure for Barcelona at about five o'clock this evening."

"And what course," inquired the lady, "did you instruct Count Christoval to adopt?"

"I requested his lordship to take no step for eighteen hours after the receipt of my despatch: but if at the expiration of that time he received not a second despatch from me, he was *then* to

conclude that circumstances were adverse—that I was no longer the mistress of my own actions—that I was either in a prison or else being hurried out of Spain——"

"And in that case?" inquired the Minister's wife anxiously.

"In that case," responded Miss Marshall, "I implored and entreated that his lordship would lose not a moment in taking horse—speeding to Madrid—calling on your husband—and making such use of my written narrative, corroborated as it was by that undertaking, as under all circumstances he might think fit."

"Then no harm is done which may not be repaired!" exclaimed the lady, in a joyful tone. "You have conducted all these proceedings, my dear Miss Marshall, with a most delicate consideration towards myself, and with far more consideration than my husband deserved at your hands. But come—let us hasten away from this dreadful place."

Kate did not require to be told twice to put on her bonnet and shawl: the turnkey was waiting at the end of the passage—and as the door of the cell opened, he hastened forward to take the light and guide the two females forth. In a few minutes they stood in the open street; and Kate breathed the air of Freedom once more just as the prison clock was proclaiming the hour of three in the morning. The hotel where she lodged, lay in the same direction as that which the Minister's wife had to take; and therefore they proceeded together. Had it been otherwise, the magnanimous lady would have all the same felt it her duty to see Miss Marshall safe to her own residence.

"You will now snatch a few hours of that repose which must be so necessary," said the lady to Kate, when they reached the door of the hotel. "By ten o'clock I shall again be with you, the bearer of Edward Russell's pardon; and you will then lose no time in despatching another courier with the precious document to Count Christoval at Barcelona."

The Minister's wife bade Kate a temporary farewell; and the house-porter speedily answering her summons at the gate, she obtained admission into the hotel. Seeking her own chamber, she lost no time in retiring to rest; and well-nigh exhausted both in mind and body, she soon fell into a profound slumber.

When she awoke, it was nine o'clock; and the good-hearted landlady was standing by the side of the couch,—infinitely rejoiced to have heard that her guest had come back in the middle of the night, and to find that the intelligence given to her by the house-porter to this effect was indeed true. But inasmuch as the landlady had been kept in ignorance of all those transactions which were going on in respect to the Minister, his wife, and the stratagem devised by the latter,—the worthy woman could not conceive how it was possible Kate had been arrested as a Carlist Spy—an allegation which she herself had not for an instant believed. She accordingly said that she supposed it had been all a mistake on the part of the police?—and Kate, not wishing to be led into farther explanations, readily assured the landlady that such was the case.

At ten o'clock, faithful to her promise, the Minister's wife—again closely veiled—called upon Kate, and presented her with a packet, not only containing her lover's pardon, but likewise the letters which had been taken from her trunk on the preceding night. Again did Miss Marshall pour forth her fervid gratitude to the excellent-hearted lady: again was her joy displayed with bright smiles and glistening tears. Oh! to think that she should have succeeded in her cherished aim after having experienced so many threatening adventures—so much affliction—and even at one time so much despair! This crowning happiness was almost too much for her: but she was not one of those women who are apt to faint in periods of excessive grief or excessive joy; and thus her natural fortitude soon came to her assistance.

She lost no time, while the Minister's wife was still with her, in penning a few hasty lines to Don Christoval,—a few lines likewise to her beloved Edward Russell, assuring him that she was about to set off in a post-chaise to meet him at Barcelona. The pardon, and this note for Russell, were enclosed in a packet addressed to Don Diego Christoval: and then Kate hastened to the landlady's apartment, to inform her that her lover's life was saved, without any condition of minor punishment,—and to request that a courier should be at once obtained to bear this second despatch on the heels of the first. The worthy woman was so delighted that she could scarcely leave off embracing Kate, who was naturally impatient that not a minute's unnecessary delay should occur ere the messenger was in his saddle. She saw the man depart; and then hurried up to her own chamber, where the Minister's wife was waiting her return.

"Now, my dear Miss Marshall," said this lady, "before we separate I have a certain duty to fulfil,—a duty which, I have much pleasure in stating, was suggested by my husband: for he feels that even the granting this pardon is scarcely an adequate atonement for his conduct towards you. You perceive, therefore, that his regrets of last night were not transitory. Indeed he has been profoundly touched by all these circumstances—and not the least by the proofs of love which I have exhibited towards him. He desires me to seek on his behalf the express assurance of your forgiveness; and he beseeches that you will not refuse to accept the contents of this purse——Nay, do not shake your head, my dear Miss Marshall! You will accept this trifling present from me, even if you have any scruple in receiving it from him?"

"Dearest lady," answered Kate, with tears in her eyes, "I consider that his Excellency has made every atonement; and from the very bottom of my heart do I forgive him the temporary uneasiness which he caused me. And you, dear lady—you have proved yourself the kindest, the best of friends! But I cannot accept that purse—I need it not——Though not rich, I have ample means for my present purposes——"

"Enough, my dear Miss Marshall!" interrupted the lady: "we will say no more upon that subject. But you will not refuse to wear this for my sake:"—and she drew from her finger a splendid ring set with brilliants.

Kate could not reject a gift so generously and also so delicately proffered: she accordingly accepted it; and after many embraces and kind words, she and the Minister's wife bade each other

farewell. Within the hour, Kate was seated in a post-chaise, issuing forth from the Spanish capital on the high road to Barcelona.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

NED RUSSELL.

ALTHOUGH the Captain-General of Catalonia had the power to suspend the execution of Ned Russell's sentence for three weeks, he had not granted a respite for that full period—but merely indefinitely. Don Diego Christoval was in reality somewhat alarmed at this circumstance: but in his letters to Kate, he had not chosen to increase her anguish by mentioning it: he however determined, as the reader has seen, to remain at Barcelona, so as to be upon the spot to renew his intercession and exert his influence afresh with the Captain-General, should it be necessary. He tolerably well comprehended the difficulty in which this great functionary found himself placed, and therefore understood how it was that he had not positively and specifically defined the respite for the full period of three weeks.

The fact was, that the utmost indignation prevailed amongst the inhabitants of Barcelona and the neighbourhood at the slaughter of the Custom-House officers; and a vindictive spirit called loudly for the summary wreaking of the law's penalty upon the head of Russell. The Political Chief, or supreme civil authority of the principality, was to a certain extent at enmity with the Captain-General; and he failed not to represent as a great grievance, the leniency shown towards the English smuggler-captain by suspending the sentence. Again, the commanders of the Spanish revenue-cruisers upon the coast, were terribly enraged at the vessel having escaped them; and requiring a vent of some kind or another for their excited feelings, they also clamoured for the prompt execution of the law's judgment pronounced against Edward Russell.

Thus was it that the Captain-General was sorely pressed by the state of public feeling and by the opinions of the authorities in his district,—so that, at the expiration of a fortnight, he sent for Don Diego Christoval, and assured him that he dared no longer delay issuing the warrant for the execution. This was on the very same day that Kate Marshall paid her second visit to the Minister, to make the appointment for the night—which appointment, as the reader has seen, was in reality to be kept by the Minister's lady. Count Christoval besought and implored that the Captain-General would suffer the dictates of mercy to ride dominant above the pressure of vindictive sentiments: he assured his Excellency that most strenuous measures were being adopted at Madrid to obtain Russell's pardon—that no doubt this pardon would be vouchsafed—and that he (the Captain-General) would therefore be much afflicted if by precipitating the execution, he should so fatally render abortive the results of the good offices that were actively making their way in the capital. It was upon a Wednesday that these representations were made: that day week the full period of three weeks, to which the Captain-General's discretionary power was limited, would expire. Don Christoval urged that it was but for this one poor week he sought the delay; and if nothing favourable transpired in the mean time, the sentence must then as a matter of course be carried into execution. Still the Captain-General shook his head, refusing to comply. Don Diego would not leave him: he plied him with all possible arguments and intercessions: and ultimately he succeeded in gaining a portion of what he asked. To be brief, the Captain-General consented to a compromise between his own inclinations on the one hand, and the clamour of the public on the other. He accorded a farther delay of three days,—adding emphatically that at eleven in the forenoon on the Saturday ensuing, the culprit must be executed, if no counter-instructions of any sort should arrive from Madrid. More than this Count Christoval could not obtain; and therewith he was forced to content himself.

Finding it now, therefore, useless to remain any longer in Barcelona,—and not even tarrying to obtain another interview with Ned Russell, whom, we should observe, he had seen almost daily during the fortnight which had elapsed since his arrival at Barcelona,—he mounted his horse and set out on the highway towards Madrid. The distance between Barcelona and the Spanish capital is above three hundred miles; and therefore Don Diego did not entertain the hope of reaching Madrid and returning to Barcelona within the prescribed interval. But he adopted his present proceeding for two reasons. In the first place, he thought it probable that Miss Marshall—if she had obtained the pardon—would, in her loving zeal and tender anxiety, be hastening with it herself to Barcelona,—the more so, as he had led her to suppose that there was still another clear week of respite for Ned Russell. If therefore she were upon the road, he hoped to meet her: he would receive the pardon from her hands—and to make everything sure, would gallop back day and night until he reached the Catalan capital once more. In the second place, he reasoned that she might have entrusted the precious document to a courier; and knowing that these individuals are apt to tarry and drink on the way, he resolved to make inquiries at every station and of every mounted messenger whom he might meet, to ascertain if the hoped-for paper were upon the road to Barcelona.

It was in the forenoon of Wednesday that he thus set out: and being an excellent horseman, as well as accustomed to the fatigues of travelling, he journeyed at a rapid pace. Resting as little as possible, and obtaining a fresh steed as often as circumstances would permit, he accomplished ninety miles by midnight,—which, considering the nature of the Spanish roads and the sorry animals used for posting or for couriers, was remarkably good. Allowing himself but a couple of hours to recruit his strength, he continued his way. Morning dawned; and after another rest, he sped along. It was about noon on the Thursday, that at a distance of one hundred and sixty miles from Barcelona, he encountered a courier whom he stopped, and to whom he put the same inquiries he had addressed to all the others he had previously met. This courier bore a despatch addressed to himself. It was the one which Kate had sent off in the latter part of the previous day, after her inter-

view with the Minister's wife at the hotel; and it contained the written undertaking signed by the Minister. Don Diego therefore saw that every hope was to be entertained: but as Kate intimated that another messenger would be sent off with a despatch to communicate the result, Count Christoval resolved to continue his ride towards the capital and thus fall in with the second messenger. It was late on the Thursday night that he met him; and the letter which he bore, contained the official pardon, duly signed and sealed by the Minister of the Interior. It would be easier to conceive than to depict the joy which the warm-hearted Don Diego experienced at this triumphant crowning of Kate Marshall's magnanimous endeavour to save her lover's life.

But the scene now shifts to Barcelona; and it is Friday night. In the principal square a number of men are raising the scaffold by torchlight. A guard of soldiers, drawn up around, keeps back the approach of the throng of inquisitive observers. The workmen wear masks upon their countenances; and the presence of the soldiery is to prevent the lookers-on from drawing so near as to be enabled to recognize any of these individuals so employed, either by their particular clothing, their stature, their voices, or the accidental slipping aside of their masks. In Spain it is considered infamous for any person to assist in erecting a scaffold for the purpose of a public execution; and it is therefore necessary to raise, as it were, by impressment the requisite workmen for this purpose. It is an act of rebellion on the part of those so impressed to refuse: the authorities however adopt precautionary measures, as just now explained, to save them from recognition,—so that they may not be thereafter taunted by their companions as "gallows-builders." Hence the working at night, and the masks upon the countenances of the workers.

It was a spectacle of solemn and awful interest, —those men with black crape upon their faces, erecting the scaffold in the midst of the square, in the centre of a *cordon* of soldiers,—the lurid glare of the torches guiding their operations, and throwing forth their forms with a Rembrandt-like effect. So closely were the soldiers marshalled in double ranks, that they not merely formed a barrier against the pressure of the crowd without,—but likewise a living wall to intercept the ruddy beams of the torches themselves: but these nevertheless played upon the bayonets, like lurid lightning on the points of so many conductors. In the iron balconies attached to the houses looking upon the square, crowds of persons—male and female, young and old, the well-born and the rich, the humble and the poor—were gathered to gaze upon the ominous spectacle; or rather to catch as much of it as could be seen through the darkness which surrounded the centre of light where the torches blazed. The work advanced rapidly: in a few hours the scaffold rose above the heads of the girdling ranks of soldiery; and long ere the first streaks of dawn were discernible in the horizon which joined the eastern waves, the sinister upright post with the strangling iron was erected. Then, a portion of the guard being left to protect the scaffold, the remainder marched away with the workmen in the midst,—the crowd being forbidden to follow on pain of the most serious consequences. The masked workmen were thus escorted to some obscure part of the city of Barcelona; and having received a liberal remuneration, they dispersed, —sneaking stealthily away to their respective homes.

Morning dawned upon Barcelona: the scaffold complete in all its appointments, stood in the market-place: a guard of soldiers surrounded it The crowd was every instant becoming more dense, —there being the same anxiety on the part of the Barcelonese to secure "a good place" to view the execution, as that which the populace of London displays on a public strangulation day in the Old Bailey. The balconies, too, of the circumjacent houses were thronged from an early hour: high prices were paid for sitting or standing room; and at the casements of many of the principal habitations, well dressed ladies might be seen. These, with their garments of black silk, their mantillas richly bordered with lace, their fans, and their satin slippers, appeared as if they were spectatresses awaiting the presence of some gorgeous pageant or gay scene, instead of the sombre and sinister procession of death. Yes: there they were, those lovely Catalan women,—seated in their balconies,—some sipping their chocolate, others conversing gaily, others quietly reading a novel,— and all awaiting the dread ceremony with the easiest air in the world.

But what of Ned Russell? what of him for whom the paraphernalia of death had been thus elaborately prepared, and on whose account these crowds were assembled? He was a prisoner in his gloomy cell,—having bidden adieu to all hope, and manfully resigning himself to the fate which he deemed inevitable. He feared not to die: and yet the hardy sailor brushed away a tear as he thought of that loving and much-loved being who would have to deplore his loss. He knew that she was at Madrid, endeavouring to obtain his pardon —or at least a commutation of his sentence: he knew likewise, from the same source (namely, Count Christoval) that she trusted to the strong letters she had received from the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle, to accomplish her aim; and he knew that her disappointment must prove of the bitterest description. For disappointed she had evidently been——Alas, poor Kate—and again he wiped away a tear. But Count Christoval himself—wherefore came he not? It was now Saturday morning; and not since Tuesday had Russell seen him—nor in the interval had he heard from him. What could this mean? Not for an instant did the frank-hearted sailor suspect that the Spanish nobleman had deserted him at the very last: but he feared lest some accident should have befallen him. Once or twice during that interval, Ned Russell had caught himself giving way to the hope that this absence and silence on Don Diego's part, were in some way or another favourably connected with his own case—that something had transpired to turn the progress of events into another channel, requiring the Count's presence elsewhere—and that he had either no time to make a communication, or else that his message or letter had been entrusted to a neglectful emissary. But as the time drew near, Ned Russell suffered himself not to be buoyed up with this hope. He considered it not merely a weakness, but likewise a folly, to give way to hope on such

slender grounds;—and with true characteristic courage, he prepared to die. A Franciscan chaplain, attached to the gaol, had on several occasions, since Russell's confinement, endeavoured to persuade him to kneel and pray: but inasmuch as the worthy priest could only convey this intimation by signs—he being as ignorant of the English tongue as the prisoner was of the Spanish,—their intercourse had hitherto amounted to mere dumb-show, the priest wishing to enforce his object by means of gestures, and the captive as peremptorily refusing in a similar manner. But on this Saturday morning—the one fixed for the execution—the prison-chaplain made his appearance, accompanied by a brother Franciscan who could speak a little English; and the latter priest endeavoured to persuade Russell to accept the last consolations of religion. Now, Ned never had been at all of a religious character: not that he was an infidel nor a sceptic—on the contrary, he was a firm believer: but his mode of life had, for obvious reasons, somewhat militated against pious habits. He did not now choose to receive consolations from a Catholic: he therefore bluntly enough informed the priest who spoke English, that he should certainly like to have the spiritual comfort of a Protestant clergyman—but that if this were impossible, he would sooner make his peace with heaven in his own way, than accept the ministry of an ecclesiastic belonging to another faith. The priest argued and reasoned with him: the prisoner was firm, though perfectly respectful;—and finding that he could make no impression, the Franciscan knelt down, in company with the chaplain,—the two thus offering up prayers in Ned Russell's cell, but in a language which he could not understand.

He wished to be alone—he wished to commune with himself during the last moments which remained to him in this life: but the Franciscans would not hear of it—they persisted in remaining; and as he gave them credit for good intentions, he said nothing rude. Withdrawing his attention from them, however, as much as possible, he prayed inwardly, and with a heartfelt devotion which never in his life had he experienced before. But the intercession which he sent up to heaven from the very depths of his soul, was far more on his beloved Kate's account than his own; and he besought Providence to endow her with the fortitude to bear the bitter bereavement which he felt to be inevitable.

The fatal hour approached; and at about a quarter to eleven, the executioner entered the cell, accompanied by the governor of the prison, a notary, and three or four *gendarmes*. The notary read the warrant of execution, signed by the Captain-General, and of the issuing of which the prisoner had received due notice on the previous evening from the governor through the medium of an interpreter. The executioner then proceeded to bind the prisoner's arms and hands,—which he did in such a way as to give him the appearance of being in the attitude of prayer. A glass of wine was next held to his lips;—but this Russell refused: he would not have it thought that he was in the slightest degree indebted to alcoholic liquor for the courage which he felt sure he should be enabled to display.

A procession was now formed, the two priests leading it; and the front gate of the gaol was reached. Several streets had to be threaded in order to arrive at the place of execution. These thoroughfares were completely lined with troops,—behind whom there were but a few stragglers as lookers-on,—those whose curiosity was excited on the occasion, having long ere this secured their places in the vicinity of the scaffold. Nor were the balconies of the houses in these streets much crowded,—the inhabitants of those dwellings having likewise proceeded to that point which was the focus of supreme attraction.

Just outside the gate of the gaol, about twenty more Franciscan monks were assembled,—attended by a couple of acolytes, each of whom bore a lantern fixed at the end of a wand, and with wax-tapers burning inside,—the breeze which blew from the sea, rendering it necessary for the lights to be thus protected. But the main feature of the religious paraphernalia remains to be described. It consisted of an enormous crucifix, on which was a paste-board effigy of the Saviour, the size of life. It was carefully and skilfully painted—but had a most hideous and ghastly effect; inasmuch as it represented the gore trickling down from the crown of thorns—from the hands and the feet, pierced with nails—and from the wound in the side. This figure was borne at the head of the procession; and as it advanced, the soldiers crossed themselves; and most of the stragglers behind the military rank, fell upon their knees. The monks began to chaunt the litany in deep lugubrious voices; while two men wearing long dark cloaks, solicited alms, which were to be expended in masses for the doomed man's soul.

In this way the procession threaded the streets leading towards the great square,—on reaching which the hum of voices that had hitherto prevailed on the part of the crowds gathered there, sank into a dead silence; and naught was heard but the chaunting of the priests and the slow tread of footsteps. A pathway up to the scaffold was kept clear in the midst of the multitude, by two lines of soldiers; and over their heads silver and copper coins were showered for the benefit of the prisoner's soul,—the money being duly gathered up by the collectors in the long dark cloaks. Meanwhile Ned Russell had advanced in the midst of the procession with a firm step and a manly bearing. There was no bravado in his looks—merely the fortitude of a truly courageous man. He was apparelled in his sailor's garb,—all except his hat, which had been taken from him, it being a part of the ceremony that he should walk bare-headed to the scaffold. But the masses of his coal black hair clustered in natural curls above his high forehead; and doubtless many a spectatress thought it was a pity that so fine a man should be doomed to die. However vindictive the public sentiment had been towards him while he was still in his dungeon, it demonstrated itself not now:—neither by word nor gesture was an inimical feeling displayed: on the contrary, there were some evidences of sympathy in many parts of the crowd and at some of the balconies. Thus the procession moved on, the effigy being carried in front—the monks chaunting—the alms being collected—the acolytes bearing the lanterns with the wax-tapers—and the crowds crossing themselves in respect for that gore-stained image

of the Saviour. The scaffold was reached; the priests ranged themselves in two rows near the steps, up which Ned Russell mounted, accompanied by the executioner, the notary, the *gendarmes*, and the Franciscan who spoke English.

Every eye was strained to observe how the doomed man now conducted himself; but not the slightest evidence of fear could be detected. His step was firm—his looks quailed not—neither did his lips quiver. He bent his gaze steadily upon the upright post to which the strangling-iron was affixed; and in obedience to a signal made by the executioner, he sat himself down upon a low wooden stool placed against that post. A breathless silence pervaded the crowd: every neck was thrust forward—all eyes were rivetted upon that focus of such dread and fearful attraction: the sky was serene above—the sunbeams glinted on the points of bayonets, and on the drawn sabres of the *gendarmes*. It was a perfect sea of faces upturned towards the scaffold: or, to borrow another metaphor, the vast square itself seemed paved with human countenances,—while the spectators in the balconies had the appearance of countless groups of individuals suspended in iron cages to the house-fronts. Yes—all was silent, save and except the deep hollow chaunting of the priests, in which was drowned the voice of the Franciscan who spoke English, and who was earnestly enjoining the doomed man to press his lips to a small crucifix which the monk approached near enough to his countenance for the purpose. But Russell firmly though respectfully refused to comply with the injunction; and the senior of the *gendarmes* made the executioner a sign to proceed.

The punishment of the *garotte* can be explained in a few words. It consists of a collar of iron attached to a post, and so contrived as to tighten suddenly by the abrupt turning of a screw. The windpipe is thereby instantaneously closed; and death quickly ensues. It is a hideous punishment —and yet perhaps is preferable to either hanging or beheading: for no blood is shed—neither are the spectators revolted by the three or four minutes' duration of spasmodic convulsions and horrible writhings on the part of the victim. It must not be thought more painful than decapitation, while it is assuredly less so than death by the halter. Startling as the assertion may seem, it is nevertheless a fact that the head of a guillotined person lives for some seconds—perhaps even a minute, after it is severed from the trunk; while all the most excruciating and keenly agonizing sense of existence is concentrated in the brain, until the nerves terminating there have ceased to throb and vibrate. As for hanging, the protracted convulsions—lasting even, as above stated, for some minutes—testify to the extent of the horrific agony endured. But in respect to the *garotte*, it is easy to comprehend how the sudden compressure of the windpipe in so violent a manner produces an almost instantaneous numbness or absence of feeling, in the midst of which life passes away. At all events, it is tolerably certain that this last-named mode of capital execution must be less painful as well as shorter than that of the other two, for the reasons set forth. All three are hideous—abominable—satanic: the punishment of death is a remnant of barbaric cruelty still lingering amidst our modern civilization: it is an atrocity which the good feeling and the good sense of the masses would abolish in a moment, ir they had the power, but which is maintained in spite of them by kings and aristocrats the better to enforce those savage laws which prevent society from making that rapid progress which, if it had its full play, would quickly abrogate royalties and patrician orders.

But to return to the scene in the great square of the Catalonian capital. Ned Russell—his arms closely pinioned—was seated upon the stool: the executioner had received the sign to finish the proceeding without delay; and the doomed man was made to place his back completely against the stout upright post. The iron collar was then fastened round his neck: his eyelids quivered not —neither did his lips: he breathed, with the secret voice of his soul, a quick but fervent prayer for Kate Marshall—he commended himself to his God—he thought that he had done with all the affairs of this life, and that in a few moments more he should be a corpse! Profound was the silence which still pervaded the gathered multitudes—a silence broken only by the low hollow dirge of the priests at the steps of the scaffold: every neck was stretched out—all breath was held: the chests of the men moved not—the bosoms of the women remained upheaved. All was suspense—deep, solemn, awful. The fingers of the executioner were upon the screw: in another twinkling of the eye it would have been all over with thee, Edward Russell!—when, from the extreme outskirt of the crowd, a voice cried out something—this something was taken up by other voices—hundreds of ejaculations swelled into thousands—and like the quick successive fire of musketry, the cries went on till they reached the foot of the scaffold; and then their meaning was understood by the persons standing thereon. It was a reprieve!

The crowd parted from the spot whence those cries had first commenced on the extreme verge: yes—that living ocean of people parted, even as parted the Red Sea to form a passage for the Israelites. And then was beholden a horseman covered with dust, urging the jaded steed along, and holding up a paper in his right hand. Whatsoever feeling of enmity the Barcelonese entertained towards Ned Russell when he was still a prisoner in his cell, had been to a considerable extent changed into sympathy, not unmixed with admiration, when his fine person was seen moving along with manly bearing towards the scaffold: but now both sympathy and admiration swelled into enthusiastic delight—and it seemed as if a really generous feeling, until this moment latent, had blazed up on the part of the myriads gathered there. Hats were waved—fans and kerchiefs likewise: the dark eyes of the Catalan women flashed joy from the balconies and from the midst of the multitudes in the square:—adown many a cheek, both male and female, did tears flow. On came the horseman, sitting like one intoxicated upon his steed: for full evident was it that he had journeyed far and had journeyed fast. We need scarcely say that the fingers of the executioner turned not the fatal screw: while Ned Russell felt that he was saved! Then, not on his own account—but for Kate's—dear Kate's—did such a gush of feelings well upward into his throat as

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almost to suffocate him; and a tear trickled down each cheek. The strong-minded man who would have scorned to weep for himself, was melted into tenderest feeling as the conviction smote him that he was saved through Kate, and that she at this moment was happy!

On came the horseman amidst the crowd which parted to afford him a passage,—closing however again immediately behind the heels of the jaded horse. On he came—that man so covered with dust—so travel-worn, that his nearest and dearest friends would not have recognized him at the time! On he came, amidst the plaudits of the crowd, with the pardon in his right hand! Although he saw full well that his mission was understood—although he saw likewise that he came not quite too late,—yet did he urge the staggering, panting, labouring animal on, until the steps of the scaffold were reached: and then, the instant he pulled in the horse, it dropped down heavily, blood gushing from its mouth and speedily turning into crimson the masses of white foam so thickly gathered there. The horseman was so exhausted that he had not sufficient energy nor agility to vault from the steed as it fell; and he lay beneath it. A dozen eager hands were in a moment stretched forth to extricate him from his dire peril; and this was accomplished to the satisfaction of those who lent their assistance, because they perceived that he was uninjured.

The pardon was handed up to the notary, who at once read it and made known its nature. The Franciscan priest who spoke English, and who was in reality a well-meaning kind-hearted man, hastened to communicate to Edward Russell that the document contained a full and unconditional pardon. In a moment the cords that bound his arms were severed—he was free: and the next instant his hand was warmly and fervidly grasped by Don Diego Christoval—the wearied and travel-worn horseman. Then shouts of applause rent the skies; and the name of the Count being mentioned as that of the bearer of the pardon, the warm-hearted Spanish nobleman found himself as much the object of enthusiastic interest as he whom he had come to save.

Let us pass over a few hours. It was evening—and in a well-furnished apartment at the principal hotel at Barcelona, two persons were awaiting the arrival of a third. The table was spread for dinner: the light of the candles was reflected by a goodly display of plate—bottles of champagne were cooling in ice: it was evident that this was to be a banquet to be partaken of under no ordinary circumstances, although but three were to sit down to it. One of the two persons was Count Christoval; and he lay reclining upon the sofa, still much exhausted. The other was Ned Russell, who was walking to and fro in a kind of delighted impatience,—every minute going to the window to see whether the chaise was approaching that was to bear Kate to his arms. He was apparelled in an entirely new suit of clothes which Don Diego had lent him, and which set off his fine form to the fullest advantage which such well-cut garments were calculated to produce. So full of elysian animation was his countenance, that whatsoever ravages imprisonment might have produced thereon, were lost in that enthusiastic glow.

It was seven o'clock; and according to Count Christoval's computation, Kate might be expected every moment. It will be remembered that the despatch she had sent off by the second courier, and which was addressed to his lordship, contained a note for Ned Russell, telling him when she should depart from Madrid, and that she should travel as quick as possible to join him in Barcelona. Thus was it known that she could not be much longer ere she made her appearance. Nor was she. A chaise presently came dragging along the street: it stopped at the entrance of the hotel—Russell waited not to observe who alighted—but darting from the room, he precipitated himself down the stairs; and cries of joy echoed in the hall as he and his beloved Kate were clasped in each other's arms. Oh! that was a joyous meeting,—a meeting such as neither of them can ever forget for the remainder of their lives! Nearly nine years have elapsed (at the time this narrative is written) since that memorable evening; and often and often does the recollection thereof come back to them fraught with ineffable feelings; it comes back to them like a delicious harmony stealing over the ocean of the past—it comes back to them like a strain of heavenly music, and ever productive of chastening sentiments, making them wiser and better, and strengthening, if possible, the love which they bear for each other and which can know no ceasing.

But let us not anticipate. Ned Russell conducted Kate Marshall up into the room where Don Christoval was waiting. In a few rapid words he had informed her, as they ascended the stairs, how that excellent-hearted nobleman had arrived in the very nick of time—and how in another instant it would have been too late. Kate threw herself at Don Christoval's feet: she took his hand—she pressed it to her lips—she tried to speak—she could not: her emotions overpowered her. But he understood all that the grateful young woman meant to express: his tears showed that he thus comprehended her. They sat down to the banquet; and though they were but three, it was as joyous and happy an one as if there had been a hundred guests vowed to unalloyed hilarity. The sparkling champagne was drunk; and when the feast was over, Miss Marshall recited her adventures in full, from the moment she parted with Don Diego Christoval in Catalonia, until the instant the pardon was placed in her hands. Ned Russell shuddered when he thus heard of all that his beloved had gone through for his sake—how she had so nearly lost her life in the forest, and what indignities she had suffered at the hands of the Minister of the Interior. But they all three commented lightly and gently upon these latter circumstances: for Kate had come harmless and unscathed through the fiery ordeal which had threatened to brand her chastity; and the Minister had made as much atonement as a man could render for a grievous wrong—a wrong which however was not, after all, irreparable.

On the following day Don Diego Christoval, Ned Russell, and Kate Marshall,—accompanied by a young Englishwoman who happened to be at the hotel, and was desirous to return to her native country,—set out in a post-chaise on their way to France. The young woman was a nursery-governess, who had come to Barcelona with an English family, but whom she had left in consequence of ill-usage.

For delicacy's sake, Kate was well pleased to have such a travelling-companion added to the party; and the young female herself was rejoiced at the proposal to journey free of expense back to her own island. We need not follow them on the route; suffice it to say that in due course they reached Calais in safety—and thence they embarked for Dover. Infinite was the joy of Kate's parents and sisters as they welcomed her arrival and hailed the presence of Ned Russell. There were such festivities at the *Admiral's Head*—such tales to tell—such adventures to recite—so much to talk over and over again, that it seemed as if neither the rejoicings nor the narratives would ever end. Don Diego was unfeignedly happy at this spectacle of perfect bliss; and he considered the circumstances favourable for a little piece of advice which he had intended to volunteer to Ned Russell. This was to the effect that it would be better for the gallant sailor to avoid his smuggling adventures in future. Thereunto Russell replied that he had already made up his mind, not merely to abandon such expeditions, but to give up the sea entirely,—adding that even if he were utterly destitute of resources, he should consider it his duty to look to some other means of gaining a livelihood, so as to avoid being ever more separated from the admirable young woman who had saved his life. But he had some little property wherewith to commence the world anew; and moreover, the sale of his vessel, which had arrived safely in port, would increase his store. Don Diego then proceeded to observe, in as delicate a manner as possible, that by way of indemnifying Ned Russell for the loss of his freight which fell into the hands of the Spanish Custom House officers, he intended to make him a present of five hundred pounds. Russell would not hear of it: the Count insisted. Old Marshall overheard what was going on; and backing Ned's decision, promised to provide so bountifully for his daughter when the marriage should take place, as to supersede the necessity of this farther display of his lordship's generosity. The Count was therefore over-ruled: but before he left Dover, he made Kate and Ned Russell such handsome presents that, so far as the amount went, they almost fulfilled his original intention.

"We shall be married in three weeks, my lord," said Russell, just previously to the nobleman's departure for Edenbridge Park, on the second day after his arrival at Dover,—the Marshalls having compelled him to give them his company thus long,—treating him as if he were a god who had descended amongst them,—"we shall be married in three weeks, my lord: and depend upon it, I shall make the best of husbands, as I am sure Kate will make the best of wives. Do you think, my lord, that if ever anything was to put her out and she did say a harsh word—which I know she won't,—but even if she did, do you think I would give her one in return? No, never! I would kiss her back into good humour. I would sooner kill myself than draw a tear from her eye, or make her beautiful face look mournful by any conduct on my part. I shall never forget what she has done for me—never forget all that she has gone through! The bare idea of it, as well as my own sufferings, has made me an altered, and, I think, a better man. As for your lordship, your name will ever be a household word with us——And," added Ned Russell, "if we are blessed with a son, I shall take the liberty—and hope no offence—of calling him Christoval after your lordship."

"And depend upon it," responded the warm-hearted nobleman, "I shall be rejoiced to stand god-father."

Don Diego took his departure, followed by the kindest wishes and sincerest expressions of gratitude on the part of Ned Russell and the Marshalls. On the very same day Kate gave away her carrier-pigeons to some neighbour who had long fancied them, and who she was well aware would treat them kindly; and the little reception-place, as well as the curiously-contrived trap-door, disappeared from the roof of the *Admiral's Head*. Kate looked back with sorrow upon the somewhat lax notions which she had hitherto entertained in certain particulars: for *she* also felt, as did her intended husband, that the incidents of the last few weeks had their moral teachings which were not to be disregarded. In this better frame of mind she possessed all the elements to render her an admirable member of society; and such she was resolved to become. The same purifying influence was shed throughout the family; and no long interval of time elapsed ere they felt that calamity and adversity often have their sovereign uses.

Three weeks after the return to Dover, Ned Russell led Kate Marshall to the altar. It was a blithe and happy day; and again was the *Admiral's Head* a scene of festivity and rejoicing.

CHAPTER CXLIX.

THE WIFE.

THE reader will not have forgotten that the mansion of the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf stood upon a gentle eminence about a mile distant from the picturesque village of Auteuil. We have already stated that by his marriage with the sugar-baker's daughter, the Viscount obtained an annual revenue equivalent to twenty thousand pounds sterling of British money; and this income, large for any individual in any country, was an immense one for a French nobleman. It is therefore scarcely necessary to observe that the chateau was furnished in the most sumptuous manner—or that there were troops of domestics forming the household establishment. But riches do not constitute happiness: and this was a truth which the poor Viscountess could, if she had chosen, proclaim with the utmost sincerity.

Stephanie possessed a warm and generous disposition: but her mind was not as powerful as her heart was sensitive. She loved her husband with all that heart and with all her soul; and she had expected, on accompanying him to the altar, that his attachment would be equally fervid. She soon however found that it was not so; and, as Madame Durand had explained to Mrs. Chesterfield, the Viscountess sought to find in herself the causes of this coldness on her husband's part, rather than to make them the source of reproach towards him. She exerted all her powers to please: she was never wearied of lavishing upon him the most delicate attentions and the tenderest caresses, if he would only give her an opportunity of proffering

them. She studied to render herself agreeable: she scrupulously examined her own conduct, bearing, and manners,—comparing them with those of her female acquaintances,—in order to ascertain wherein she herself was deficient, so that she might improve according to those finished models. But her endeavours were thrown away, so far as her husband was concerned. Two years had they been married at the time when we introduce them to our reader; and it seemed as if the Viscount was thoroughly wearied of his wedded life. Any society was agreeable to him in preference to that of his spouse; and yet he had not as yet treated her with direct unkindness, much less with downright cruelty. But he was indifferent; or perhaps indeed he entertained a stronger feeling in respect to her—one bordering upon aversion. Sufficiently magnanimous, however, to conceal this, he forced himself to treat her with courtesy when they were together: but courtesy from a husband to a wife is a very sorry substitute for the endearments of love.

The reader will recollect that we took a temporary leave of Augusta Chesterfield and the Viscount de Chateauneuf, at the moment when the former consented to abandon herself to the latter, and when the young nobleman, full of rapturous delight, snatched her to his breast. A fortnight had now passed since that date; and the Viscount was a constant visitor at the Durands' villa. He passed nearly his whole time with Mrs. Chesterfield: he was infatuated with her. Possession was not accompanied with satiety: on the contrary, it only augmented the vehemence of the passion which he experienced for her. Perhaps the ardour of her own temperament sustained the fiery feelings of sensuous desire which her truly remarkable beauty had in the first instance excited: while her conversation—for she was a highly accomplished and intellectual woman—rendered her an agreeable companion. Thus was it that the Viscount was never wearied of her society; and he regretted that he could not be entirely with her from morning till night and from night till morning. But he had not as yet thought of perpetrating an abrupt outrage towards his wife by abandoning her altogether,—though even *this* he would assuredly have done, if Augusta Chesterfield required him. She however had said naught on the subject—but had rather acted as if she were anxious to avoid an explosion of scandal as much as possible, and to keep their amour as secret for the present as circumstances would permit. Such, at least, appeared to be her policy. As a matter of course, the Durands saw what was going on; but they were by no means shocked thereat—nor did Madame Durand venture the slightest remonstrance. In the first place, those things are not thought of so much in France as they are in this country; and in the second place, the Viscount de Chateauneuf failed not to make the Durands some very handsome presents almost immediately after his connexion with Mrs. Chesterfield had begun. Nor were the servants at the little villa forgotten; and a liberal douceur, presented to each, ensured the secrecy that was thus sought to be obtained.

We have said that a fortnight had elapsed since the commencement of that amour; and we must now direct the reader's attention to a particular morning, when the following scene took place.

In a sumptuously furnished apartment at the chateau on the eminence, the Viscount and Viscountess were seated at breakfast. The young lady was, as Madame Durand had described her, eminently beautiful,—with chesnut hair, dark blue eyes, and a transparent complexion. Of slender shape, she possessed a figure the lightness of which was replete with elegance and grace, but not of too sylphid a symmetry to be without well-developed proportions. She had not that vivacity which usually characterizes the women of France; but her manners, as well as her style of beauty, would have led a stranger to pronounce her a native of England. She was more tranquil than the gay Parisian ladies are wont to be: modest, unassuming, and without affectation, she was as incapable of coquetry or of flirting as she was averse to the fulsome adulation which is offered up at the shrine of female beauty in the brilliant circles of fashion. Thus, when she sought to be very cheerful, in the hope of pleasing her husband, the endeavour was visibly forced,—because she was too unskilled in the arts of dissimulation to conceal it. But let us listen to their discourse, as they are seated at the breakfast table between nine and ten o'clock on the particular morning of which we are speaking.

"My dear Jules," said the Viscountess, after a long pause, and now speaking with a considerable degree of hesitation, though in the most affectionate manner, "I hope you will not forget that you have guests to dinner this evening?"

"Ah, I remember!" he ejaculated, with an air of vexation: "a party made expressly for the Villebelles! It was absolutely necessary to invite them; for the Marquis and I were schoolfellows—though he is some three or four years older than myself."

"You seem annoyed, my dear Jules," observed his wife, gazing upon him with tender anxiety, "that the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle should have been invited?"

"Oh, no! not annoyed, I can assure you!" exclaimed the Viscount, forcing himself to laugh with an assumed gaiety. "Annoyed?—no, that is out of the question—only I was thinking that it was just possible I might be detained by business——"

"Pardon me for asking the question," said the Viscountess, kindly,—"but have you, my dear Jules, anything to trouble you? If so, pray speak, that I may do my best to soothe and console you."

"Trouble me, Stephanie!" he cried. "What could have put such an idea into your head?"

"Only," she answered, still more timidly and reluctantly than before, "because—because you have been away from home so much of late—that—that—I was fearful you had some business of a disagreeable nature——"

"And pray, Stephanie," exclaimed the Viscount somewhat sharply, "can I not be away a few hours of a day without subjecting myself to be thus catechized?"

"Oh! catechized, Jules! No—no—not for the world! I did not mean *that*:"—and as the big tears rolled down the poor young lady's cheeks, she rose from her place at the table, and throwing her arms around her husband's neck, besought him in a broken voice to pardon her if she had offended him.

"Offended me—no, Stephanie! you have not offended me!" he said, forcing himself to give a single caress for the dozens she lavished upon him; and then he suddenly repulsed her, as if the kiss which he had bestowed was an act of treason towards Augusta Chesterfield.

Thus did he prove himself more scrupulously considerate on behalf of his mistress who was elsewhere, than on behalf of his beautiful wife who was there present, doing her best to demonstrate the love she bore him!

"Jules, wherefore repulse me?" she murmured, with a look of such deprecating tenderness that his conscience was smitten. "What have I done to grieve or annoy you? You assure me that you are not offended with me; and yet I perceive the contrary. Tell me what I can do to convince you that it was unintentional on my part."

"Really, my dear Stephanie, you are most unreasonable," said the Viscount. "Pray sit down and think no more of what I have said—what I have done——"

"But if you be angry with me, Jules?" she observed, as she meekly resumed her chair.

"Angry—no!" he cried, almost petulantly. "Wherefore should you persist in saying that I am angry? Really, Stephanie, I must henceforth be very guarded over my looks and my words that the least thing thus brings tears to your eyes."

"Do you not know, Jules," she continued, still weeping, "how much I love you? and will you be so cruel as to upbraid me for being sorry when I think I have given you offence, or when I fail to please you? I wish—I wish, Jules, that you would understand me better!"

"Stephanie, I understand you full well," the Viscount hastened to respond: "but we have been married two years, and are no longer lovers: we are husband and wife."

"No longer lovers?" she ejaculated, as if a new light had suddenly been flung in upon her mind: then, as the tears gushed forth anew from her eyes, she added, "Oh, I had hoped and thought we should always be lovers, and that we should not cease to exist as such because our hands were united at the altar."

"See, Stephanie," ejaculated the Viscount, "how unreasonably—I might almost say, how foolishly you talk. And it is because these ideas which you have just expressed, rule your actions likewise, that I may perhaps seem a little impatient towards you. At the slightest word you weep——you frequently give me hints that I am absent from home—and in the presence of friends your conduct is *too* endearing. You do not seem to know how to draw the proper distinction between the bearing which lovers adopt towards each other, and that which husband and wife ought to maintain."

"I only know, Jules," was the unsophisticated answer of the beautiful Viscountess, while her heart swelled with emotions,—though she now contrived by a powerful effort to keep back her tears, fearing to give her husband renewed offence,—"I only know that I love you; and I obey the dictates of my own heart in all my conduct towards you."

"But do you not see, Stephanie," resumed her husband, "that a man cannot always remain tied to his wife's apron-string. When we are together, I do my best to render you happy and contented——"

"Yes—*when* we are together," she murmured, without the slightest intention of conveying a remonstrance or a reproach, but merely giving audible expression to her own unsophisticated thoughts: for the idea that was uppermost in her mind, was that she had no earthly happiness save and except in the society of her husband, and that she could wish him to be always with her.

"Now, look how you answer me!" he cried, with a sudden start and gesture of impatience. "If I make a simple observation, your reply is a remonstrance—an upbraiding—a taunt——"

"Good heavens, Jules, what a construction you put upon my words!" she exclaimed, an expression of anguish upon her countenance, and her hands clasped in despair. "I did not mean it—no, I did not mean it! Why will you thus take offence, dear Jules, where none was intended?"

"But, Stephanie, these scenes are little calculated to render my home happy. And," added the Viscount, greedily clutching at any excuse which might satisfy his conscience for his treatment towards his beautiful and affectionate wife: "and—and—it is really no wonder that I should sometimes stay out longer than I otherwise intended——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "now I have learnt the fatal truth at last! Yes, yes—I all along suspected it! Nay, more—I was convinced of it! It is I who make your home wretched—it is I who drive you from it!—and yet heaven knows that I would make any sacrifice to keep you with me! I am miserable when you are absent: and therefore it would be madness on my part wilfully to force you to remain away."

With these words, the unhappy young lady covered her countenance with her hands, and burst into a fresh paroxysm of anguish. Her bosom was convulsed with sobs; and if the most dreadful calamity had just alighted upon her head, it was impossible for her to be more afflicted. In the midst of this scene a domestic in a splendid livery entered the room, bearing the morning's letters and newspapers upon a silver salver. The Viscount snatched them up in a petulant manner: while Stephanie, quickly removing her fair white hands from her face, leant over her plate to conceal her tears from the lacquey.

"See how you disgrace me!" ejaculated her husband, when the servant had retired and the gilded door had closed behind him. "Now I shall acquire the reputation of ill-treating you. That fellow will go amongst the other servants and say how he found you in tears."

"Forgive me, Jules—pray forgive me, my dearest husband! I see that I am always in the wrong——"

"There you are again, with your reproaches!" interrupted the Viscount. "You mean me to understand that *I* am in the wrong—that I treat you cruelly——"

"Good heavens!" murmured the unfortunate Viscountess, now wringing her hands in despair; "what am I to do—what am I to say, to convince you that I had no such intention? Ah, Jules, if you could only read my heart, as God now reads it——"

"Positively, Stephanie," ejaculated the Viscount, starting up angrily from his seat, "this scene is becoming wearisome to a degree. If we were still lovers, it would be bad enough: but from a wife to her husband, it is really intolerable. I must beg and beseech that you will not give way to these gusts of temper."

"Temper?" she echoed, as if a new light had broken in upon her, thus suddenly making her aware that her temper was a bad one—an assurance which she was fully prepared to take on the mere word of her husband, and to adopt the fault as sincerely and contritely as if the imputation were perfectly correct.

"Yes, *temper!*" he answered, somewhat fiercely: for on his side the impression was that his wife had echoed the word in a spirit of indignant repudiation: "I said *temper*—and since it has come to this, I may as well be candid with you at once. Now, look you, Stephanie," he continued—and we must do him the justice to add that he did not at the moment perceive how his unfortunate spouse was regarding him with mingled affright and dismay,—"look you, Stephanie! I am getting thoroughly wearied of these scenes: they are repeated too often. Always tears, or else implied upbraidings—and then a perfect storm of lavished endearments! That is not the life I wish to lead. Try and be always the same; and I shall be always the same to you. But don't disgrace me in the presence of our servants. You seem to think, Stephanie, as I just now said, that I am to be ever tied to your apron-strings—that now I have become the husband, I am still to play the lover. I can do nothing of the sort; and what is more, I do not intend to attempt it. If you think that because you brought me a fortune, you have a right to a devotion such as is only displayed during the period of courtship——"

"Jules," exclaimed the Viscountess, springing forward and falling upon her knees at her husband's feet, while her clasped hands were stretched out towards him: "do not—do not, for heaven's sake, attribute such unworthy thoughts to me! My fortune—or the fortune that I brought you—I have never once thought of it! Would to God that I had been ten times as rich, that I might have bestowed all, all upon you——"

Here was another offence—though the reader may full easily comprehend how very far it was from the unfortunate young lady's intention to give it. But she stopped short suddenly, perceiving how her husband started—how his countenance became stern—and how he drew himself up with the haughtiest dignity.

"Madam," he said, "rise from that posture. It is not one which I ever desire my wife to adopt towards me:"—then as the Viscountess rose to her feet—cowed, dismayed, and full of anguish—he went on to say, in a tone which struck her as implacably severe, "Your words have conveyed such a taunt as I little expected ever to hear issue from your lips. You would remind me that I owe my wealth to you; and though you gave the assurance the semblance of love, yet was it the cruellest of reproaches thus to declare that you wished you had been richer so as to lavish your fortune upon me! Ah! then I am a sort of pensioner—I am bribed with gold? Verily, madam, I would have you reflect that rank is above wealth, and that I gave you a name which all the sugar-baker's money-bags never could have purchased."

With this heartless speech the Viscount de Chateauneuf turned abruptly upon his heel: but as a low moan struck his ear, he was smitten with remorse for what he had said; and turning quickly round again, was only just in time to catch his anguished wife in his arms. For, overpowered by the cruel violence of that blow which his words had dealt her, she was tottering and about to fall.

"Stephanie! Stephanie!" he exclaimed, half petulantly, half kindly: "how foolish of you to provoke these scenes!"—yet he felt that he himself was wrong, though thus endeavouring to fling all the blame upon her.

"Forgive me, Jules," she murmured, feeling it was a luxury thus to be clasped in his arms. "I do indeed see that my conduct has been very wrong——I know that I make you unhappy—every day tends to convince me of my own failings, and that I am not fitted to be your wife—— But bear with me, Jules; and I will endeavour—Oh! I will endeavour, to be more guarded in future!"

"Well, well, Stephanie," said the Viscount, his conscience torturing him as if a scorpion were planting its sting in his heart,—"let there be an end of this."

"There shall, Jules," she murmured, smiling sweetly upon him as his arms still clasped her slender waist. "But tell me that you love me—do tell me that you love me——"

At this instant the door again opened,—and the lacquey re-appeared, bearing upon the silver salver a letter which by some accident had been omitted from the batch previously brought in. The Viscount became crimson, and turned away from Stephanie as if he had been caught embracing the wife of another instead of his own. The incident was a most untoward one. The quarrel—if such it could be called, where the quarrelling was all on his own side—had just been about to end in reconciliation, when the appearance of this servant made all Jules de Chateauneuf's choler rise up again.

"Stephanie, this is perfectly intolerable!" he ejaculated vehemently, and almost fiercely, the moment the lacquey had again left the room. "You disgrace me thoroughly! At first it is whining and crying, so that the servants think you are ill-treated: then it is this maudlin embracing, so that they will fancy I am begging your pardon, confessing I am a naughty boy, and that I will never do such a thing again! Now, all this is only bringing me into contempt; and when I next look my servants in the face, I shall see a sneering smile upon their lips. It is brought about by your folly——"

"I am indeed most unfortunate," murmured the poor young lady, sinking down upon a seat. "I endeavoured to please you—but I cannot!"

"There you are again!" ejaculated the Viscount, stamping his foot upon the carpet. "Why will you persist in this style of upbraiding? It does no good—it only creates ill-feeling——"

"My dear husband," said Stephanie, now rising up, and looking as well as speaking with a sort of despairing calmness, "I am afraid that you will never have real happiness with me. I am not fitted to be your wife: I am beneath you in birth

—beneath you in education—beneath you in knowledge of the world——"

"Stephanie, you will drive me mad!" cried Jules: for these were precisely the ideas which he *did* entertain in respect to his wife, but which nevertheless he could not bear to have so forcibly brought to his mind, and by that very wife herself. "You must not talk thus——"

"Well, I will not. We will speak on other subjects. Ah! I remember, we were just now conversing about the dinner-party: for the Villebelles, you will remember, are coming. What little I saw of the Marchioness the other day, when you introduced me to her, I liked very much. I should be pleased to cultivate her acquaintance: I think she would become my friend;—and I feel that I do want a friend—a real friend! There are times when I am so lonely—so dull—so desponding——"

This was another unfortunate speech, but made in a perfectly artless manner, and most unreflectingly.

"By heaven, another taunt!" ejaculated the Viscount. "How many more complaints? However," he immediately added, perceiving that his poor wife was becoming so deadly pale again that it seemed as if she were about to faint,—"we will not say any more now—we will not renew these unpleasant topics."

"No, don't—pray don't," she murmured, with a look of earnest appeal: then approaching him half tenderly, half timidly—but not venturing to embrace him, nor even to take his hand, nor place her own lovingly upon his shoulder, as she longed to do,—she said, "Do not forget, dear Jules, that the company will be here by seven. And," she added, perfectly innocent of any sinister motive, "it is not yet eleven o'clock: so you have plenty of time to amuse yourself till dinner."

He was about to ejaculate that this was another taunt: but feeling the inutility of renewing the war of words—or rather of prosecuting it on his own side—he said, "No, no—I shall not forget—I will be home by seven:"—and he quitted the room.

Stephanie proceeded mechanically towards one of the windows; and in a few minutes, as she gazed vacantly forth, she observed her husband hurrying along in the direction of Auteuil. He was on foot: she looked wistfully after him in the hope that he would turn his head and wave his hand—but he did not; and she could not help feeling disappointed that he should not think it possible she might be at the window. Then, as she remained there, watching his receding form, she could not help noticing the hurried manner in which he was proceeding;—and now she bethought herself that for the last fortnight he had not been once out on horseback. This circumstance had not occurred to her before: and though not for a single instant did she now regard it as suspicious, yet she nevertheless wondered thereat. She knew how passionately fond he had ever been of equestrian exercise; and it was therefore natural she should marvel that he had ceased to take it. But she soon fell into another train of reflections in respect to Jules; and retiring to her own boudoir, sat herself down to review all the details of the scene which had just taken place,—so as to glean therefrom the necessary hints to reform her conduct for the future. For the poor creature really and truly believed that all the fault was on her own side; and that she therefore did indeed require such self-reformation.

CHAPTER CL.

THE MISTRESS.

THE Viscount de Chateauneuf hurried along in the direction of the Durands' villa. He sped thus precipitately, in order if possible to outstrip his own thoughts. He was too intelligent not to comprehend that he had been harsh, severe, and cruel towards his wife; and he was too generous not to regret it. Still he really and truly did believe that she had intended as taunts some of the things which she had said: but he could not help acknowledging that by his own conduct he fully deserved them. He knew that he was wrong—he knew that Stephanie loved him—and he felt that he was guilty of a monstrous injustice in punishing her for the very testimonials of affection which she lavished upon him. There was a moment during this rapid run from his chateau to the villa, when he felt inclined to turn abruptly back—retrace his steps—take his wife in his arms—confess his error—and vow that he would be cruel to her no more: for this was the first time that ever such serious words had passed between them, or that he had actually shown open resentment at what he had described as the "scenes" which were wont to take place. Hitherto those scenes had been insignificant in comparison with this one of to-day; and thus was it that his remorse was for an instant so poignant.

But, alas! that good resolution was abandoned almost as suddenly as formed: he had not the moral courage to retrace his way and perform the part which his better feelings had for an instant suggested. Besides, could he abandon his Augusta? No, no—he could not; and he hastened onward to the Durands' villa. For the rest of the distance he endeavoured to reason himself into the belief that he was justified in the course he was pursuing—that Stephanie was indeed unfitted to be his wife—and that he had therefore a right to have a mistress. And then, too, he contrasted Augusta with Stephanie,—the former all fervid passion, the latter all girlish love without its fiery sensuality—the former glowing and ardent, the latter only sentimentally tender—the former a companion who could talk upon a thousand things, the latter an inexperienced creature whose very ingenuousness was irksome and whose *naiveté* was that of a school-girl. Still, as the Viscount thus drew his comparison between his mistress and his wife, he could not crush the secret feeling which was in his mind, that his conduct was an injustice, an outrage, and a cruelty towards that affectionate being who he knew would, if necessary, lay down her life to serve him. He was glad when he reached the villa; for he longed in the arms of Augusta to forget all these remorseful and compunctious feelings.

Mrs. Chesterfield was half reclining upon a sofa in the sitting room when Jules de Chateauneuf made his appearance. She wore an elegant

morning-wrapper, somewhat more open at the bosom than was consistent with modesty: the luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated over her half-naked shoulders; and her large dark eyes swam in a delicious languor, as she smilingly welcomed the Viscount's presence. The logs crackled and blazed in the fire-place: the atmosphere of the apartment was warm and slightly perfumed. Though not yet mid-day, the appearance of that voluptuous creature and the fragrance which seemed to breathe around her, made the hour appear as fitted for the blandishments of love as if night were upon the earth, the curtains were drawn, and the lamps lighted.

"You are later than usual, my dear Jules," said Augusta, as he placed himself on the sofa by her side and encircled her waist with his arm. "Ah! and I perceive that something has troubled you," she added, her taper fingers pushing back the masses of naturally curling hair from over the high forehead of that youthful countenance which was so fine a specimen of masculine beauty. "Tell me, dearest Jules,"—and she imprinted a glowing kiss upon his cheek,—"what is it that has annoyed you?"

"Augusta," he replied, with the suddenness of a resolve taken in a moment, "I cannot lead this life any longer! I cannot divide my time between you and my wife: my heart is *here*—and I am wearied of playing the dissembler *there*. It is cruel and unjust towards every one: cruel and unjust towards you—cruel and unjust towards my wife—cruel and unjust towards myself! No, I can endure it no longer! I must be all in all to you, as you are all in all to me——I will leave you no more!"

"Tell me, dear Jules, what has taken place," said Mrs. Chesterfield, gazing with fervid tenderness upon her paramour. "Have you had words with the Viscountess?"

"Words?" he ejaculated: "henceforth I feel that we shall always have words, if we continue to live together! It cannot be! It is impossible that I can receive her caresses only to repulse them: *that* is a part my better feelings will not longer allow me to play. No, I cannot! Much rather would I break with her at once—candidly confess to her that I love another—and beseech her not to interfere with my happiness!"

While he was thus speaking, Mrs. Chesterfield drooped her head upon his breast; and as her countenance was thus concealed from him, an expression of triumphant satisfaction appeared thereon,—as if she felt that she had now brought him to the point towards which she had gradually, and cautiously, and skilfully been leading him on. And if he could only have seen that look, transient though it were, a veil would have fallen from his eyes in a moment: he would have penetrated the selfishness of the syren to whom he had abandoned himself—he would have had the conviction flashing to his soul that though the ardour of her sensual passions might be real enough, the tenderness of true love which she professed for him, was naught but a delusion and a snare!

"What would you do?" she asked, assuming a low tremulous voice: "would you precipitate matters?"

"There can be no rash precipitation," he exclaimed, "in doing that which has now become imperative. I must either renounce you or my wife. I cannot renounce you, my Augusta, whom I love so devotedly: but I will renounce her whom I love not and have never loved. The world must know it at length: but the world shall say I have not been unjust towards her. I will give her half my fortune: the remaining half will leave me still rich—amply rich enough for you and me to live in comfort, and even in splendour."

"Then do you mean, my beloved Jules," asked Augusta, "that we are to live openly together henceforth—that the necessity for secrecy shall exist no more—that caution shall no longer be used?"

"Such is my meaning," ejaculated the Viscount vehemently. "Do you object, Augusta? do you still tremble at the idea of all this coming to your husband's knowledge?"

"Candidly I do," she answered, raising her head and looking him earnestly in the face.

"You have something in your mind?" he said: "speak—what is it? Have I not sworn to be as a husband unto you?—wherefore need you care for him who is absent? Have I not vowed to be a father for your expected babe?—what anxiety, then, can you entertain for the future welfare of your as yet unborn child? Speak, Augusta—speak candidly!"

"Oh! it is all this," she murmured, forcing tears from her eyes, "which troubles me and makes me wretched. It is only when you are with me that I am happy: because *then* I forget everything—the virtuous past—the guilty present—the uncertain future! But when I am alone, a thousand terrors haunt me. I have a husband who is rich, and under whose care neither myself nor my expected offspring need ever tremble at the idea of want. It is not even now too late for me to take a step which will still leave me in that state of confidence! My husband need not know that I have been guilty—that I have dishonoured him: these people here are bribable; and you, as a man of honour, would never breathe to a soul what has taken place between us. But I must fly hence—I must see you no more!"

"Oh, wherefore this language?" exclaimed the Viscount: "what have I done to deserve it? You apprehend poverty——Good heavens! am I not far richer than your husband, from all that you have told me? and can I not at any moment place you in a state of independence? Ah, I comprehend!—your fears are natural, as the world goes; though in respect to *me*, they are not just. You fancy that my love may cool——"

"Remember, my dear Jules," interrupted the syren, murmuringly, "the love of man is different from that of a woman. A woman may conceive a sudden passion, and yet cling to it devotedly for all the rest of her life-time: but a man who loves suddenly, grows cool suddenly——"

"Augusta, I swear that you do me wrong!" ejaculated the Viscount de Chateauneuf. "The passion I have experienced for you, has become interwoven with the very fibres and principles of my entire being. But it is my aim and my duty to ensure your happiness——Oh! full well do I appreciate the immensity of the sacrifice which you have already made for me, but which has still to be consummated! Now listen, Augusta; and you shall have proof that I love you—you shall have proof too that I am an honourable man!"

"I know it, Jules—I know it," she said, nestling still closer to him, and pressing her dewy red lips to his cheeks.

"What would I not do for you, adorable creature?" he said, straining her to his breast. "Again I say, listen. It is decided—I part from my wife, and from that moment must you be as a wife to me. But no care shall you have for the future. In resigning before the whole world the husband who is absent, you shall—as I before said—be placed in a condition of independence. My revenue consists of twenty thousand a year, speaking in the money of your own native land. One half I assign to my wife; ten thousand remain to myself. Of this sum I shall settle a clear moiety upon you. Nay, offer no objection! It is paltry and miserable to proffer money-considerations as proofs of love; but in existing circumstances it is needful—and you will regard my conduct in that light. I will proceed forthwith to a notary: I will order the deed to be drawn up. In a few days it will be in readiness; and at the hour when I sign it in

your presence, must you renounce your husband—renounce every family tie, if need be—and become wholly and unconditionally mine! From that hour too shall we dwell together, wheresoever your inclination may suggest that we fix our abode: and we shall be as husband and wife. But now, Augusta, not another word on this subject! not a remonstrance! I am determined: it is a duty—and I will fulfil it!"

The wily woman could well afford a perfect gush of enthusiastic feeling as she strained the young Viscount in her arms and covered his cheeks and his lips with kisses.

"And now I go," he said, "at once to give the requisite instructions to a notary. I shall return to pass a few hours with you. Unfortunately I have guests this evening at the chateau; and I must be there——inasmuch as for the present it is better I should keep upon terms with my wife until all arrangements be carried out. So that at six o'clock I shall be compelled to leave you: but to-morrow I promise to be earlier with you than to-day."

Having embraced Augusta Chesterfield, the Viscount de Chateauneuf took his departure to give instructions to a notary to prepare two deeds—one making over half his revenue, together with the chateau itself, to Stephanie—and the other assigning so much of his property as would produce five thousand a-year, to the woman with whom he was so profoundly infatuated.

Soon after six o'clock in the evening, the Viscountess de Chateauneuf commenced her toilet for the party. One of her maids, on ascending to her mistress's chamber to render the wonted assistance, gave her the pleasing intelligence that the Viscount had just entered and was likewise gone to dress. Thus Stephanie was relieved from her fears lest he should not be punctual. A little before seven they met in the drawing-room; and for the first few moments the Viscount was troubled and embarrassed, as he thought that in a few days he was to deal a blow fatal to the happiness of the unfortunate and confiding wife who now greeted him with such sweet smiles. This feeling rendered him unusually kind, and even affectionate towards her:—at least his manner had the appearance of affection; and Stephanie was radiant with happiness, as she said to herself, "Yes, he loves me—he loves me! How could I ever have doubted it?"

In a few minutes the guests began to arrive—some fifteen or sixteen in all; and amongst them the Marquis of Villebelle and Constance. The Marquis had within the last few days received a much higher and far more lucrative appointment than that which he had held at the Court of Madrid: he was now to be accredited as Minister to the Court of Naples—but he had still leave of absence for a few weeks ere setting out for his new post. Being prosperous in his worldly circumstances and blessed in his love for Constance, he was supremely happy; and his fine countenance reflected the feelings of his heart. The Marchioness of Villebelle—for so we must call Constance—looked eminently beautiful; and she also was happy in her Etienne's love, as well as in the contemplation of the honours bestowed upon him by the King, and which his own talents had won. But still the felicity of Lady Saxondale's younger daughter was not complete: inasmuch as she had for some time past been troubled and anxious on account of those relatives who were so dear to her. She had heard of the terrific exposure which took place a few months back at Saxondale Castle, when the double wedding was so strangely interrupted and broken off: she knew therefore that her sister Juliana was thoroughly and irredeemably disgraced, and that her mother's name had suffered at the same time in the estimation of the world. She likewise knew that her mother and Juliana were not now together—that the former was in England, and the latter somewhere upon the Continent; and she was grieved that her sister suffered her not to become acquainted with the place of seclusion to which she had retired. Constance was also aware that her brother Edmund had married the Baroness de Charlemont who was tried for the murder of her first husband;—and all these circumstances were sufficient to depress her somewhat. Nevertheless, her husband's love—so sincere and so devoted—was powerful enough to mitigate much of that full amount of grief which she would otherwise have experienced; and no one, as she entered the brilliantly lighted saloon at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion, would have suspected that the felicity of the Marchioness of Villebelle was thus alloyed.

We will pass over all details in respect to the sumptuous banquet which was served up: let our readers suppose it to be over, and the company dispersed about the suite of gilded and brilliantly lighted saloons thrown open for their reception. There was music in one: in another the tables were spread with splendidly bound volumes and prints: in a third the card tables were set out: and the fourth opened upon a spacious winter-garden, or conservatory of glass, heated by artificial means, and containing a varied selection of the choicest plants as well as of several fruit-trees from the tropics. The Viscountess de Chateauneuf and the Marchioness of Villebelle, who had already conceived a friendship for each other, were seated together upon a sofa in the music-room: a young lady was at the piano—another at the harp: others were sitting with young gentlemen, and listening to the melody, or perhaps whispering with each other: the elderly gentlemen and ladies were in the card-room: in short, all the company were agreeably occupied in some way or another. The Marquis of Villebelle had accompanied the Viscount de Chateauneuf into the conservatory; and for some little time they were engaged in examining the exotics and the fruits of the palm, the banana, the citron, and the orange trees.

"My dear Viscount," said the Marquis, when the inspection was concluded, "you and I have known each other since our boyhood; and though there has been an interval of some years since last we saw each other, yet is the friendly feeling of other times in no way diminished on my part."

"Nor on mine, my dear Villebelle," responded Chateauneuf, warmly grasping the hand of the Marquis.

"I am sure of it," resumed the latter; "and therefore you will not think it strange or impertinent that I am about to speak to you on a certain subject. In a word, my dear friend, you are not happy: and if there be any circumstance in which you require the counsel or consolation of one who experiences a sincere regard for you——"

"But wherefore, Villebelle," interrupted the Viscount, "do you think that I am unhappy?"

"I know it," was the response given by the Marquis. "When I met you the other day in company with the Viscountess,—although we were only a brief ten minutes together,—I nevertheless saw that you had moments of abstraction, and that your mind seemed to be wandering to other subjects far different from those which had arisen in conversation. After we separated, my wife observed to me that she thought you had something darkening your soul. To-day, my dear Chateauneuf, I have observed the same manner on your part. My experiences of the world have been somewhat severe; and its teachings have enabled me to catch at a glance the slightest evidences of unhappiness in those with whom I come in contact. Think not for a moment that I seek to penetrate, through mere impertinent curiosity, into your affairs: but there have been times in my life when I should have hailed the counsel and the solace of a true and sincere friend as something as welcome as an angel-visit. I am your friend, Chateauneuf; and that is the reason I am thus speaking."

The Viscount bent down his eyes, and reflected profoundly for more than a minute. He was too intelligent not to be perfectly aware how very serious a step he had resolved to take, in renouncing his wife for the sake of Mrs. Chesterfield; and though very far from entertaining the idea of retracing his way, or revoking the preliminaries which he had that morning initiated with the notary,—yet it occurred to him that it was altogether a matter on which he really ought to consult friendly advice. The notary himself had strongly urged him to adopt this course; and though Jules, in his infatuation for Augusta, had impatiently rejected the legal gentleman's counsel at the time, —it now recurred to him with added force, in consequence of the observations made by Villebelle.

"I do not know," he said, abruptly breaking silence, and raising his eyes as suddenly, "that I am unhappy——In one sense I am the happiest of men——"

"You ought to be," said the Marquis. "You possess ample revenues—a fine position—a beautiful, amiable, and affectionate wife——But, ah! I hope that I have said nothing indiscreet?" he ejaculated, perceiving that a cloud came over the handsome countenance of the young Viscount.

"My dear friend," said the latter, taking the hand of the Marquis and pressing it with a sort of convulsive force, "you have indeed touched a true chord, though not in the manner you intended or supposed. I said that in one sense I was the happiest of men; and I meant that I am thus happy in possessing the love of one of the most adorable of women. But this, Villebelle," added the Viscount, lowering his voice, to a scarcely audible whisper,—"this is not my wife!"

The Marquis was amazed: for with all his experience of the world, and with all his penetration, he had failed to discern that the Viscountess de Chateauneuf possessed not her husband's love.

"Yes—it is as I tell you," continued the Viscount, having glanced around to assure himself that they were alone together in the conservatory. "My wife is as nothing to me: my mistress is everything. The former makes me wretched: the latter is the source of all happiness. Ah, my dear friend! you cannot read the real disposition of women by merely beholding them at the dinner-table, or in the midst of brilliant society. Doubtless I have my faults:—but who has not? Stephanie has however ten thousand times more failings than myself. Do not misunderstand me! The snow is not purer than her chastity as a wife; but I speak of infirmities of temper which are but too well calculated to make a household unhappy and drive a man to distraction. Regarded individually, each perhaps is an airy nothing; but aggravated —accumulated—taken together, they constitute an insupportable tyranny. One single drop of water falling on the stone, makes no impression; but the constant dripping wears it away. A single blow upon the head, does little harm beyond the transient pain: but a continuous succession of blows produces madness. Thus is it with those infirmities of temper to which I have alluded: and now do you comprehend me?"

"I understand and I am astonished," replied the Marquis of Villebelle. "I am sorry that I should have turned the conversation in a manner to evolve such a topic,—a topic invested with the solemn sanctity of a family secret."

"Do not be sorry on that account, my dear Villebelle," replied Chateauneuf: "I am glad that you have thus spoken. I do indeed require a friend: for I am about to take a step of paramount importance——nothing less than separating from my wife!"

The Marquis of Villebelle looked deeply concerned, as indeed he was. He needed not to ask the question whether the Viscountess was as yet aware of her husband's intention; for he felt assured that she was not. He therefore experienced an illimitable compassion for that young lady, who was evidently lulled into the security of her own love—cradled in the confidence of her own affection—unsuspicious of the storm which was gathering above her head. He was concerned, too, on account of his friend Jules de Chateauneuf: for he could not but consider that it was indeed a fearful step that he had resolved upon taking.

"Yes," continued the Viscount, "I am determined——unless indeed you show me good reason to induce me to alter my resolve. A man is bound to consult his own happiness: he must not sacrifice it for the sake of one woman, when it can be ensured by another,—although the former bear the more sacred title of wife, and the latter be in the false position of a mistress. Such is my case: —can you therefore blame me? I shall not act dishonourably in financial matters with regard to Stephanie. Though none of her fortune is by deed settled upon herself, I purpose to give her half; and a moiety of my own half shall I settle on my mistress. This is what I have promised the latter: and indeed, I have already instructed a notary to draw up the requisite deeds."

"Jules de Chateauneuf," said the Marquis of Villebelle, addressing his friend in a solemn voice and with a grave countenance, "you have done well to consult me in this instance. You have brought yourself to the edge of a precipice: for God's sake, let mine be the hand which is to draw you back! You must reflect—this resolve which you have adopted in madness, must be renounced in the hour of sober deliberation. What! for some of those little peculiarities of temper which no women

are without,—and which, if we of the sterner sex study ourselves impartially, we shall find that we likewise possess,—will you on this account break up your home—perhaps deal your wife a death-blow—with the certainty of being yourself brought sooner or later to bitterest repentance?"

"Oh, my dear friend!" exclaimed the Viscount, "it is easy for you to talk thus—you, who are unacquainted with all the circumstances! I tell you that I cannot live with Stephanie. I never loved her: it was a marriage of expediency on my part: she brought me a fortune—I gave her a lofty title and a proud name in return;—on that score, therefore, we are equal. This very day has there occurred between us a scene which, had you beheld it——"

But he stopped suddenly short, conscience-smitten: for with almost overpowering effect did the sense of his own harshness and severity towards Stephanie, rush back to his mind. The Marquis of Villebelle comprehended in a moment wherefore his friend thus abruptly left off speaking; and his looks became graver still.

"Jules," he said, "you are conscious of faults on your own side. Now, I intend to speak plainly: it is my duty as your friend. Look you! I begin to understand your exact position. You have a mistress whom you love better than your wife; and you are seeking for every possible excuse and apology for abandoning the one so as to give yourself up entirely to the other. You are naturally magnanimous and generous; and a man with such a heart, cannot be without scruples when about to perform a bad action. Yes—do not be offended: I repeat, a bad action! And it is in order to tranquillise the qualms of your conscience that you seek to throw upon the head of your wife all the blame of the proceeding you purpose to adopt. Thus is it that you magnify her failings into faults; and if needful, you would exaggerate her faults into crimes. Come, Jules, be reasonable!—you cannot shut out from yourself the conviction that I have spoken truly."

"I confess, my dear Villebelle, that I am much struck by all you have said," responded the Viscount, who was now pale and agitated: but then arose before him the image of the brilliantly handsome Augusta Chesterfield, and he hastened to observe, "Oh, if you saw her to whom my heart is devoted, you would admit that any sacrifice ought to be made for such a being! She is grandly beautiful——she is a wife too, who sacrifices husband, family, fame, and all that a woman can possibly hold dear——yes, of all will she make a sacrifice for me!"

"And you have informed her, I think you said," observed the Marquis, "of the nature and amount of the settlement you purpose to make in regard to her?"

"Oh, assuredly!" was Chateauneuf's quick rejoinder. "She has given me so many proofs of her love, that I have been but too anxious to afford her the evidences of my own in return."

"I see, my dear friend," resumed the Marquis of Villebelle, "that you are under the spell of an infatuation. This you cannot help; we are but weak mortals—and I know what it is to love passionately and devotedly."

"Your own wife?"

"Yes: and I am proud to confess it! And by the bye, loving my wife as I do—feeling that no possible temptation would render me unfaithful to her, much less that I myself could take the initiative in making overtures to any other woman—you will not be astonished or offended at the proposition I am about to lay before you, and which you can have no scruple or fear in accepting."

"Speak, my dear friend: what is it?" said Jules.

"I will tell you. Permit me," continued the Marquis, "to be introduced to this mistress of your's. You can take me to her in my capacity of your best friend—one who has known you ever since you were eight years old——Will you do this?"

"I shall be proud and happy!" exclaimed the Viscount; "and then you will indeed admit that in renouncing my wife, I am consulting my own happiness by thus obtaining the opportunity of giving myself up wholly and solely to her who has enthralled my heart. To-morrow at mid-day I will call for you at the hotel where you reside."

"Be it so," said the Marquis. "But perhaps it would be better, under all circumstances, that you should introduce me with some assumed name. There are considerations——"

"I understand full well," interrupted the Viscount: "you occupy a prominent position in the world—and moreover you would not wish it to reach the ears of the Marchioness that you had visited a lady in such a false position as Mrs. Chesterfield—for that is the name of my mistress. Well then, you shall go under an *incognito;* and to-morrow at mid-day I will come for you."

"And in the meantime," said the Marquis, "you promise me, Jules, that you will not sign any paper—you will not breathe a word to the Viscountess of your intentions of separation—you will not compromise yourself in any way?"

"I faithfully promise," rejoined Chateauneuf. "Indeed the documents themselves will not be in readiness for several days. Oh! I understand full well the friendly purpose you have in view. You intend to judge for yourself whether Mrs. Chesterfield——"

"She is an English lady, then?" interjected the Marquis.

"Yes. But, as I was observing, you intend to judge whether she is worthy of being preferred to Stephanie? Now, I am quite content to constitute you the tribunal of taste in this matter; and I will abide by your decision, on condition that you promise it shall be strictly impartial—justly and righteously deciding between the merits of the two ladies, without the least reference to the position of one as a wife, or to that of the other as a mistress. Do you, on your side, promise me this?"

"Most faithfully I do: and on the honour of a gentleman, will I give you my sentiments without bias and without prejudice. We will now continue the discourse no longer: let us return to the ladies—and to-morrow at mid-day I shall expect you."

CHAPTER CLI.

THE EXPERIMENT.

THE Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying at an hotel in the fashionable quarter of the Place Vendome: for inasmuch as their residence in Paris was but temporary, they had not of course thought it worth their while to take a house for themselves, nor go into furnished apartments. We must now look into the room where they were seated at breakfast, on the morning after the party at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion. Constance was in an elegant *deshabillée*, which set off her beauty to a most fascinating advantage. The Marquis was in a handsome *robe-de-chambre*, confined at his waist with a silken cord, having large tassels at the ends. Despatches were lying upon the table, addressed to "His Excellency the Marquis of Villebelle, Minister-Plenipotentiary to the Court of his Majesty the King of Naples:"—but these were merely to furnish him with some instructions which he was to send off to the *Chargé d'Affaires* in the Neapolitan capital, and not to abridge the leave of absence which he had obtained on his appointment to his new post.

"And so, my dear Constance," said the Marquis, "you are pleased with the Viscountess de Chateauneuf?"

"I like her much," was the young lady's response: "but I am afraid that she is not altogether happy; for there are moments when she wears a transient expression of sadness. And the Viscount too—there is decidedly something upon his mind——"

"I know it all, my dear Constance," interrupted the Marquis. "But do not question me now: I will tell you everything in the course of the afternoon; for I am going to try an experiment, which will probably result—or, at least, I sincerely hope so—in the restoration of the happiness of this young couple."

"And I also sincerely hope, Etienne, that you will succeed. I had my misgivings last night, that they live not comfortably together. The courtesy which the Viscount displayed towards his wife, was somewhat forced: while on the other hand she frequently threw timid glances at him, as if fearful that she might be committing herself in some way or another, by an unguarded word or even a gesture or a movement. Ah! when I think of all the happiness which you and I enjoy, my beloved Etienne, I can deeply feel for other married couples who do not experience a similar amount of felicity. Stephanie de Chateauneuf is a very sweet creature. I have formed quite an affection for her; and should be so rejoiced if you are enabled to report the success of the experiment to which you have alluded. Ah! when I bethink me, I yesterday sketched from memory the portrait of Stephanie——"

"And you had never seen her before the other day—and then only for ten minutes?" exclaimed the Marquis, laughing good-humouredly.

"Judge for yourself whether the outline is so very inaccurate. Of course, having been so many hours in her society last evening, I shall now be enabled to make my sketch more perfect. But meanwhile, tell me what you think of it."

Thus speaking, the beautiful Constance rose from her seat; and flitting across the room, raised a large portfolio from the sofa where it lay. She was bearing it to the breakfast-table, when the Marquis, with all the gallantry of a lover, sped after her, and took the burthen from her hands—for which he received an affectionate look.

"Now let us see the sketch," he said, turning over the drawings in the portfolio. "I know you are a proficient in this beautiful art, my sweet Constance——But really!" he ejaculated, as he took up the portrait alluded to, and which was only just commenced; "this is indeed striking! You have caught the expression to a nicety: all the outlines are perfect: there is not a single correction to make! You have nothing to do but to put in your shading—and the work will be admirable."

The countenance of the Marchioness showed how delightful were her husband's praises; and he threw upon her a glance of fondest affection. Oh! how different was this breakfast-table scene from that which took place on the previous day at the Viscount de Chateauneuf's mansion, and which we have described in another chapter!

"Why, what have we here?" ejaculated the Marquis, as he turned over the drawings: "something that I never saw before! You naughty creature, how was it that you did not show me this?"

"I intended," replied Constance, blushing and smiling: "but I did not like to do so. The truth is, I thought that I had made myself too coy and sentimental——"

"No, dearest—this was indeed the way you often looked," exclaimed the enraptured Marquis, "when we were wont to meet in the garden of Saxondale House. Ah! often and often too, has there been such a scene as this—Mary Anne rushing towards us to give us due warning that your mother had just returned home from an airing in the carriage! It is life-like: the whole scene is perfection——No, there is a fault! You have flattered *me* too much."

"Say rather, my dear Etienne, that I have flattered myself."

"That is impossible, Constance!" exclaimed the Marquis: "you could not do so. Ah! though I am your husband, I am still your lover likewise—and more inclined than ever, perhaps, to be so, now that I am reminded by this picture of the days of our courtship. Oh! that was a period of pleasing pain—hope mingled with fear—delicious interviews enjoyed by stealth, and with the constant apprehension that they would be interrupted!"

A few words will suffice to afford an idea of the pencil-sketch which Constance had thus made, and which the Marquis of Villebelle had so unexpectedly lighted upon in the portfolio. It represented herself and him seated together in a garden—she looking somewhat coy and sentimental, as she had observed—he evidently in the attitude of one who was breathing the language of love in the ear of his adored one. At a little distance Mary Anne, the faithful lady's-maid,—who, by the bye, was still in the service of Constance,—appeared in the background, hastening forward with alarm depicted on her countenance, to warn the lovers that their stolen interview must not be prolonged.

"Yes—those were indeed days of pleasing pain," said Constance; and she hastily passed her kerchief across her countenance: for the retrospect had conjured up certain associations with regard to her mother, her brother, and her sister.

"Do not weep, my beloved wife," said the Marquis, drawing his chair closer to that in which she was seated; and taking her hand he pressed it warmly—while he gazed with tender devotion upon the countenance over which the shade of sadness had come. "No happiness can be perfect, Constance, in this world. There are always some drawbacks; and we must accept with gratitude the amount of felicity which we do experience. Only conceive how infinitely superior is our condition, to that of a wedded couple who enjoy not each other's love, and know not therefore the charms of sweetest domesticity!"

"Yes—I am not unmindful of all that," answered Constance, thanking her husband with an affectionate look for the attempt which he thus made to console and cheer her. "Nevertheless, you must admit, Etienne, that it would indicate hardness of heart if I did not feel the calamities which have overtaken my family. My mother disgraced—her name become a bye-word in the society which she once adorned—convicted of having propagated a serious calumny in respect to Mr. Deveril;—Edmund having made such a shocking match;—Juliana I know not where—but she, alas! disgraced likewise——Oh, Etienne! promise me, promise me, my beloved husband, that if ever you obtain the slightest hint as to where my unhappy sister has secreted herself, you will tell me—that I may fly to her—that I may console her! For I am sure that whatever her faults may have been, you would not debar me from the performance of such a duty?"

"No, dearest Constance—not for a moment would I!" exclaimed the Marquis; "and you will not even require my solemn promise that if accident should render me acquainted with the seclusion to which your unfortunate sister has fled, I would not lose a moment in revealing it to you."

"A word from your lips, dearest Etienne," responded Constance, "has ever the sanctity of the most solemn vow. Yes—I know that you would not for an instant hesitate to let me see my sister, if you by any chance obtained tidings concerning her. But we will now talk on other subjects: I must not be sad and gloomy when in your society."

"No," rejoined the Marquis; "because my happiness depends upon your's. And now, Constance, I have to inform you that at twelve o'clock I am going somewhere with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. It is to carry out that experiment to which I have alluded. I shall tell you nothing more now: have patience, my beloved one, until my return. You need not fear that I shall be very long absent."

But in the meanwhile, let us see what the Viscount de Chateauneuf was doing elsewhere. This young nobleman was much struck by the remarks and remonstrances of his friend Villebelle at the time the discourse was taking place in the conservatory: but when he awoke in the morning, the effect thereof was much deadened. We cannot say that it had altogether passed away,—because Jules de Chateauneuf was too intelligent and likewise possessed of feelings naturally too good, not to have experienced, even after the lapse of some hours, the lingering influence of Villebelle's impressive language. But he was still as much infatuated as ever with Augusta Chesterfield: her image, which was uppermost in his mind, was full of a ravishing beauty; and he said to himself that such a woman was worth making any sacrifice for. Nevertheless, he preserved a certain degree of kindness of manner towards Stephanie at the breakfast-table; and he studiously avoided taking offence at anything which she said. He moreover faithfully kept the promise which he had given to the Marquis of Villebelle, and hinted not a single syllable of the intentions which he harboured in respect to a separation. The Viscountess, finding him more gentle towards her—more lenient—more tolerant—secretly flattered herself that a favourable change had taken place within him; and she lost no opportunity of lavishing upon him the evidences of her sincere love. Even during the ordinary routine of the breakfast-table and the accompanying conversation, there are a myriad little ways by which a fond and adoring woman can display her tenderness for the beloved one: looks, and words, and attentions, all may be rendered available for this purpose. And so it was with the Viscountess on the present occasion; and more than once Jules de Chateauneuf was compelled to admit to himself that the affection his wife cherished for him was deep, tender, and sincere.

It was about half-past ten o'clock when he issued forth from his mansion to pay the accustomed visit to Augusta; and he set out thus early, according to the promise made her on the preceding day. On reaching the little villa, he found Mrs. Chesterfield expecting his arrival; and she welcomed him with the usual amount of blandishments, caresses, and smiles,—all lavishly given and rapturously received. Again did he seek in his own mind to contrast the fervid endearments of Augusta with the more ingenuous and unsophisticated evidences of his wife's affection: but the comparison he drew was favourable to the former. He sought to persuade himself that there was something insipid and mawkishly sentimental in the love of Stephanie—while the ardent caresses of his mistress filled his soul with an almost frenzied passion. It was a complete infatuation under which he laboured in respect to Mrs. Chesterfield: it was a devouring, furious, storm-like whirl of passion through which, by her blandishments and the gorgeous splendour of her voluptuous beauty, she had the power to hurry him.

"Dearest Augusta," he said, in the course of conversation, "I have a great favour to ask you."

"There is no favour, beloved Jules, that you can demand at my hands," responded the syren, "which I am not prepared to grant. Name it. Is it some new proof of my devoted love which you require?"

"No—scarcely that," answered the Viscount. "I will explain myself in a few words. Yesterday I met a friend, a certain M. Meurice, who was a schoolfellow of mine—a gentleman of wealth and standing; and he dined with me last evening. Remember, Augusta, he is one of my oldest acquaintances; and we entertain a very sincere

friendship for each other. I sought an opportunity to speak to him alone, of old reminiscences —those school-boy days which it is sometimes so pleasant to look back upon; and the discourse, by a natural transition, turned upon the present circumstances of each of us. Your image was uppermost in my mind: I longed to eulogize you to my friend. I could not resist the opportunity: my heart was so full of love and devotion for you that it needed a vent for its feelings. Besides, it is so sweet to confide to the ear of friendship all that one experiences in respect to so strong a passion. M. Meurice was rejoiced to hear that I am so blessed in your love: he is no straight-laced, sanctimonious individual who would take the wife's part and chide the faithless husband. In short, he entered into all my feelings: for *he* likewise has loved passionately and fondly; and he could appreciate the gushing enthusiasm with which I spoke. Now, dearest Augusta, the favour I ask at your hands, is that you will permit me to introduce my friend to you presently."

"I cannot," she answered, "have the slightest objection after the arrangements which were solemnly entered into between us yesterday. Had not those arrangements been made, I should chide you, Jules, for the proposal to present any one who might hereafter meet me with my husband and make me blush at the recognition. But inasmuch as it is agreed that I am to renounce my husband——"

"Yes—for my sake," quickly responded the enamoured Viscount. "In a few days all will be settled; and there can consequently be no harm in your receiving this bosom-friend of mine."

"Assuredly not," rejoined Mrs. Chesterfield. "Any friend of your's, Jules, will ever be most welcome to me."

"And you will apparel yourself, dearest," whispered the Viscount, tenderly and coaxingly, "in your most becoming dress: for though you are lovely and adorable in any garb, yet would I have you set off your splendid charms to the utmost advantage, that you may in every way shine so as to justify my taste in the eyes of my friend."

"Fear not, Jules," answered Augusta: "my appearance will be worthy of your love."

"I must now leave you therefore," added the Viscount: "for I have promised to fetch M. Meurice at mid-day. He is staying at an hotel in Paris: and by one o'clock at latest we shall be with you."

Jules de Chateauneuf embraced his mistress tenderly—and issued forth from the villa. In order to keep his amour hitherto as secret as possible, he had never used his own carriage, nor been attended on horseback by any one of his grooms, on the occasion of his visits to the villa; and therefore he was now compelled to take a public vehicle to proceed to Paris—which however was only about a couple or three miles distant. He reached the hotel where the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle were staying, precisely at mid-day; and having paid his respects to Constance, he took her husband, who was in readiness, away with him. He could not help noticing that when the Marquis left his wife—though it was only for a few hours —he embraced her; and the spectacle of this connubial bliss caused a pang of remorse to shoot through the heart of the young Viscount. He even sighed; and the sound fell not unnoticed upon the ear of his friend, who was secretly rejoiced at this proof that all the better feelings of the Viscount's soul were not completely deadened within him.

"You doubtless consider me uxorious to a degree?" observed the Marquis, as he took his seat by the side of the Viscount in the hackney-coach, which immediately rolled away from the hotel. "But I assured you last night that I regard my wife with the tenderest and sincerest affection."

"And may you always be happy in this love of your's," observed Jules: but afraid that his friend would seize the opportunity to lecture him on his conduct in respect to Stephanie, he hastened to give the conversation a dexterous turn, by observing, "If I mistake not, you told me last night that the Marchioness is the daughter of an English peeress named Lady Saxondale? I was not struck by the name at the time: but after you were gone, I bethought myself that it was not altogether unfamiliar to me. Is there not a nobleman of that name?"

"There is," answered Villebelle, in a very serious manner. "He is my wife's brother; and I regret to say that he has contracted a most foolish alliance——"

"Ah, I remember!" ejaculated the Viscount. "The Baroness de Charlemont! Pardon me for having touched upon a topic which can be by no means agreeable——"

"There is no need for apology, my dear friend," interrupted the Marquis. "It is a circumstance which I deplore on the part of one so nearly connected with my beloved wife: but it is not a topic to be avoided in shame on my own account."

"Assuredly not," responded Chateauneuf. "How was it possible that Lord Saxondale could have made such a match?"

"Doubtless he became infatuated with that artful and designing woman," responded Villebelle. "Ah, Jules! there are women of this kind in the world—women who insidiously weave their chains of silk and gold around the too susceptible heart——"

"True! there are such women," exclaimed the Viscount, again solicitous to divert the conversation into another channel: for he more than half-suspected that Villebelle was applying these remarks to his case in respect to Augusta. "And are this Lord Saxondale and the Marchioness your wife, the only children of her ladyship?"

"No—there is another—an elder sister," replied Villebelle.

"Is she too married?" asked the Viscount, merely for the purpose of keeping the conversation away from topics which were disagreeable to himself,—although he felt convinced that when once Villebelle should have seen his Augusta, he would no longer give utterance to covert inuendoes relative to artful and designing women.

"No: Juliana Farefield—for that is the name of my wife's sister—is unmarried," returned Villebelle. "But, by the bye, have you devised some *incognito* for me to adopt?"

"Yes. You are to pass as M. Meurice; and furthermore, I have given Augusta," continued Jules, "a most excellent character in respect to the liberality of your sentiments. I have assured

her that in you she will find no straight-laced, demure, sanctimonious individual;—and therefore, my dear Villebelle, you will be upon your guard accordingly."

"Fear not, Jules," rejoined the Marquis, "that I shall in any way deport myself so as to make you regret having assented to my caprice in presenting me to Mrs. Chesterfield. Whatever opinion I may form, will be in no way shadowed forth until you and I are alone together again."

The vehicle rolled onward; and in due course stopped at the gate of the grounds in which the little villa stood. In her sitting-apartment within the walls of that villa, Mrs. Chesterfield was placed in a half-reclining attitude upon the sofa. She had apparelled herself in her handsomest morning-dress; and it was one which admirably became the style of her dark beauty. She had taken immense pains with her toilet. She knew that the passion of the Viscount would be sustained and enhanced by any encomia which his friend might pass upon her beauty; and she therefore had not failed to render herself as captivating as possible. The dress, fitting tight to the bust, developed its rich contours,—though the high corsage of a morning-garb concealed them. She wore her hair in bands; and a rich natural gloss rested upon those luxuriant masses. Her very attitude upon the sofa was studied,—a mirror opposite showing her that the position she had thus chosen was well suited to her purpose. When, therefore, she heard the vehicle stop and the gate-bell ring, she did not rise from that sofa: nor, as the sounds of footsteps, approaching the front-door from the gate, reached her ears, did she so far gratify her curiosity as to jump up and peep from the window to see what sort of a person her lover's friend might be. No: she retained her half-reclining position upon the sofa,—one well-shaped foot resting upon a hassock, and her face ready to be turned towards the door when it opened, so that the light from the casement might fall upon her features and display the aquiline beauty of her profile. She was resolved to please the Viscount's friend; and as this endeavour on the part of a woman is always attended with more or less excitement, it brought up a richer carnation tint to the delicate olive of Augusta's complexion. Another glance at the mirror was completely satisfactory; and now footsteps were ascending the stairs.

The door opened: the Viscount entered first; and he began with the proper formula for such occasions:—"Permit me to introduce——"

But he was suddenly cut short: for as the Marquis of Villebelle, immediately following, crossed the threshold, he exclaimed, "Juliana!"—and then stopped short in utter amazement.

Jules de Chateauneuf started on hearing that name—the name of the Marchioness of Villebelle's sister—the name of one, too, who the Marquis himself had during the ride assured him was unmarried!

CHAPTER CLII.

THE EXPERIMENT'S RESULT.

YES: Augusta Chesterfield was none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter! As the reader may suppose, she was seized with a perfect consternation on beholding her brother-in-law; and the thought flashed to her mind that in introducing him to her, it was a premeditated stratagem on the part of the Viscount to have her thoroughly unmasked and exposed. And this supposition was natural enough, inasmuch as Juliet had assured her that the individual about to be presented bore the name of *Meurice*. The carnation tint was in a moment heightened into the deepest red on Juliana's countenance: but not a syllable—not even the slightest ejaculation—escaped her lips: she was stricken dumb by the overpowering sense of shame, astonishment, confusion, and even rage.

"Juliana!" cried the Viscount de Chateauneuf, repeating the name which had burst from the lips of the Marquis: "what is the meaning of this? Tell me, Villebelle—is it your sister-in-law?"

Then the Hon. Miss Farefield instantaneously perceived that it was no trick on her lover's part—merely some coincidence which she could not however fathom, nor had leisure to reflect upon. Starting up from the sofa, she advanced towards the Viscount,—at the same time flinging a swift but significant glance upon Villebelle, as much as to enjoin him to betray her no farther than he had already done.

"Yes, dearest Jules," she said, taking his hand, and gazing up into his countenance with all her power of fondest cajolery; "my name is indeed Juliana, and not Augusta: but in no other circumstances am I changed. The adoption of that other name was a whim and a caprice——But why do you withdraw your hand? why do you look thus coldly upon me?"

Jules de Chateauneuf, however, made no answer. An expression of anguish passed over his countenance: and turning abruptly aside, he pressed his hand to his brow, as if to steady his thoughts. The horrible idea was agitating in his mind that he was the victim and the dupe of a designing woman, and that Villebelle's ominously uttered words had become justified in their predictive reality. For all in a moment the thought had occurred to the young Viscount, that if this were Juliana Farefield—and she *unmarried*—the child that she bore in her bosom was the fruit of an illicit amour: she must therefore be a wanton, and she had sought the retirement of this villa to conceal her shame! If she had been another's with the sanctified title of a wife, it was nothing in his estimation: but if she had been another's without that title, then was she instantaneously converted into a licentious profligate—a being of gross impurity!

"For heaven's sake ruin me not with *him!*" were the hastily whispered words which Juliana breathed aside to the Marquis of Villebelle, the instant that the Viscount so abruptly turned away from her.

"Juliana," responded her brother-in-law, but also speaking in a subdued and rapid manner; "I

JULIANA

dare not mislead my friend on any account. It would be the death of his wife!"

"Etienne, I implore you," murmured Juliana, ready to sink with shame and anguish, "save me from exposure! Remember that I always favoured your suit with my sister——"

"It cuts me to the very soul to harm a hair of your head—for Constance's sake," rejoined the Marquis. "But what am I to do?"

"Villebelle!" exclaimed the Viscount de Chateauneuf, suddenly turning round at this juncture and clutching his friend by the arm—for it was evident that the young nobleman was labouring under the most painful excitement: "tell me, wherefore has your sister-in-law sought this retirement. She is in a way to become a mother: has she a husband? does he hold an Indian appointment? Tell me everything, I conjure you!"

The Marquis of Villebelle's countenance became so over-shadowed with gloom, and he looked so deeply afflicted, that the Viscount de Chateauneuf had no need to have his questions answered in words. He read the responses on his friend's features; and they were damnatory of the woman who until within the last few minutes had exercised such a fascinating power and spell-like influence over him.

"Juliana," he said, in a low and profoundly mournful voice, "I will not reproach you. I awake from a dream: but it was a dream which was delightful while it lasted—and I have to thank you for so much bliss. Happy is he who enjoys the fragrance of a flower in the ignorance that its leaves may distil poison! No: I will not reproach you! But all is at an end between us!"

"No, no!" shrieked forth Juliana. "Speak not these harsh words! It is a death-blow which you are dealing! I love you, Jules! On my soul I love you!——Heavens, he deserts me!"

The Viscount de Chateauneuf rushed precipitately from the room, in so excited a manner that he waited not even to speak another word to his friend Villebelle: nor did he pause upon the stairs to see whether this nobleman was following him. Juliana flew to the window: the Viscount was speeding towards the gate——Oh, for one look!—that she might catch his eyes—that she might passionately wave him back! But no: he turned not his regards upon her, even for a single moment!—the gate opened—he rushed through—it closed behind him: she beheld him no more!

But let not the reader fancy that Juliana really loved the Viscount with a true sincerity of passion. No such thing. She had merely been playing a deep game, in order to secure to herself a lover and a fortune,—inasmuch as she was disgraced beyond the hope of obtaining a husband, and was moreover dependent in a pecuniary sense upon her mother's purse. If she exhibited so much anguish, it was not altogether feigned: on the contrary, it was almost entirely genuine,—but not an anguish on account of a lost love; it was the anguish of disappointment and rage at finding all the fabric of her hopes thus dissipated in a single instant. Such an anguish as this lasted only so long as there was the slightest chance of bringing her victim back and regaining her empire over him: but when the garden-gate shut him out from her view, and she saw that all was lost, she grew suddenly calm.

"Etienne," she said, turning abruptly round and flinging her flashing glances at her brother-in-law, "it is you that have done this!"

"Not intentionally, Juliana!—on my soul, not intentionally!" he answered, while his looks still continued to indicate the deepest commiseration and sorrow. "Listen for a few moments while I explain——"

"There is nothing to explain," cried Juliana petulantly: "the mischief is done—you have ruined me!"

"There must be explanation," said the Marquis, "because there is accusation. I tell you, Juliana, that all this has been perfectly unintentional on my part—and that when I came hither, I had not the slightest notion of encountering you. I could not have foreseen it!"

"But wherefore," demanded Miss Farefield, "that feigned name of Meurice?"

"That feigned name of Meurice—I will explain the incident," responded the Marquis, serious and mournful alike in his tone and looks. "But be patient, Juliana—give not way to these impetuous gestures—these angry looks. The Viscount de Chateauneuf spoke to me, last night, in enthusiastic terms of a lady who had won his heart; and after some discourse it was agreed that I should be presented to her this day. Now, you can well understand that, holding a high official appointment—and for the sake of Constance likewise——"

"Oh, I comprehend!" interrupted Juliana with bitterness: "you did not choose to come under your own name to pay a visit to a kept mistress! Well," she continued, in a somewhat milder manner, "it is at all events satisfactory to know that this was not a vile trick nor a detestable stratagem, planned for my exposure."

"No!" ejaculated Villebelle: "I would not for the world aggravate whatsoever sorrows and afflictions you may have already endured! But wherefore have you kept your dwelling a secret from Constance? You must have known she was in Paris: you must have known likewise that she loves you—that she has yearned after you——"

"Etienne," interrupted Juliana vehemently, "is it not but too evident that my pathway and that of my sister lie in different directions on the broad arena of the world? You must not think that I am altogether so changed—so altered——so degraded," she added, her voice suddenly sinking as she spoke the word; and the word itself being spoken with a painful effort,—"as to be indifferent to what may be thought of me, or to be enabled to look those who know and love me, in the face without a blush. Etienne, I am unhappy: my fortunes too are desperate. You know what has happened in England: Constance likewise knows it:—and could you think I should voluntarily seek you out? No: I should only be bringing disgrace upon my sister; and I am not bad enough to do that. Being compelled to renounce the idea of obtaining a husband——But no matter! Let this interview end. Leave me!"

"But you will see Constance?" urged the Marquis. "It was only a few hours back that she was speaking of you with tears in her eyes; and she made me promise that if by any accident I should discover the place of your abode——"

"Then let Constance come to me this evening," said Juliana. "A few hours must elapse before

we meet, that I may have leisure to compose my troubled thoughts. Do not let her come until the evening. And now leave me, Etienne."

"I go, Juliana," said the Marquis: but still lingering, he added in a hesitating manner, as if fearful of offending one whose temper was naturally vehement, and now particularly ruffled,—"Is there nothing I can do for you? Tell me, Juliana—my purse is at your service——"

"Thank you—I have sufficient means for the present. My mother supplies me with funds. Ah! Etienne," she added bitterly, "with what a family have you connected yourself!—my mother's reputation itself damaged—my brother married to a murderess—myself——"

"Juliana, give not way to these reflections—at least not in such a spirit," interrupted the Marquis, deeply pained. "It is not impossible for you to experience happiness in this world. In some agreeable seclusion, and under a feigned name——"

"Enough. Leave me to chalk out my own career—to follow my own destinies! And now go, Etienne: I must be alone."

Villebelle extended his hand, which Juliana took for a moment; and as she turned abruptly away, he slowly quitted the room. On issuing forth from the villa, he found the hackney-coach still waiting in the road.

"Where is the gentleman who accompanied me?" he asked of the driver.

"Gone, sir," was the response. "He came out and rushed away like one demented."

Villebelle reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that Jules de Chateauneuf, in a thoroughly altered state of mind, must have sped homeward to make his peace fully with his amiable and loving wife: but he longed to proceed to the mansion to assure himself that such was the fact. On the other hand, he was anxious to inform Constance that he had discovered the abode of her sister, whom she was to see in the evening: but then he reasoned that as some hours must yet elapse ere this interview could take place, Constance in the meantime would be full of anxiety and suspense, and would be asking him a thousand questions, to which he might not be able to give very satisfactory replies: for he was resolved to screen Juliana's most recent faults and frailties—those in respect to Chateauneuf—as much as possible from the Marchioness. He therefore came to the conclusion that it would be better to remain some little time absent from the hotel; and in the interval he could visit the chateau. He accordingly entered the hackney-coach, and ordered the driver to take him to the Viscount's mansion.

In a short time the Marquis of Villebelle alighted at that palatial residence; and, on inquiring of the hall-porter for the Viscount, was informed that he was in the drawing-room with the Viscountess. Villebelle's heart warmed at this intelligence, which served to confirm his previously conceived hope that the husband would now do his duty towards the tender and affectionate Stephanie. He ascended to the apartment, to which a handsomely-dressed lacquey led the way; and the instant the door was thrown open, he observed the Viscount and Viscountess seated together upon the sofa. The glance that Jules immediately flung upon him, was expressive of mingled gratitude and firmly-taken resolve,—gratitude for the part which the Marquis of Villebelle had so generously borne in the transaction, and a resolve that thenceforth he would profit by recent experiences. As a matter of course, Villebelle assumed the air of one who was merely paying an ordinary visit, and came for no special purpose; because he naturally concluded that the Viscount had not explained to his wife a single detail of the circumstances which had thus induced him to seek her presence at a time when he was wont to be absent from her. The Marquis saw that Stephanie was completely happy; and during half-an-hour's conversation, he likewise perceived that the Viscount treated her with a kindness which was truly affectionate, without being so overstrained as to excite her suspicion that it was the result of no ordinary occurrences. When Villebelle rose to take his departure, Jules de Chateauneuf accompanied him from the room; and leading him into another, embraced him with the most grateful warmth.

"Through you, Villebelle," exclaimed Jules, "I have been wakened from the most delusive of dreams. Your's indeed is the hand which has snatched me back from the brink of a precipice!—you have saved me from consummating towards my wife an outrage which I should full soon have been compelled bitterly to repent. Ah! when I ere now broke away from the presence of that guileful syren, it was with a sudden springing up of the tenderest yearning towards Stephanie. All her good qualities seemed to crowd in upon my convictions in a moment: they blazed as it were upon my mental view—they made me comprehend what a treasure I possessed in her, and how infamously I had been about to sacrifice her!"

"My dear friend," answered Villebelle, "you know not the pleasure it affords me in hearing you thus speak. Ah! Jules, it would have indeed been something to be deeply deplored, if a noble heart such as your's naturally is, had been ruined by an infatuation."

"I am an altered man," replied the Count: "a veil has fallen from my eyes—and in the same moment that the character of one woman was exposed in its darkness, that of another was revealed in its brightness. Yes—I am an altered man; and perhaps it is fortunate that all this should have taken place. Hitherto I had not loved Stephanie—now I feel that I can adore her: hitherto her demonstrations of tenderness had appeared to me insipid and of school-girl mawkishness—henceforth they will constitute the greatest charms of my existence. Oh! I feel, my dear friend, that there are moments in a man's life when it requires some startling incident to arouse him into a due appreciation of what is good, and what is virtuous, and what is beautiful,—at the same time that he is snatched from the midst of delusions, falsities, and artificialities. To you am I indebted for all that has occurred; and rest assured, Villebelle, that whensoever you set foot within these walls, you will henceforth be enabled to contemplate a scene of connubial bliss as perfect as that which you yourself enjoy."

The two noblemen were melted to tears: they grasped each other's hands—Jules with the fervour of gratitude, Etienne in the warmth of congratulation: and thus for the present did they separate.

The Marquis of Villebelle, re-entering the hackney-coach, was driven back to Paris; and on ascending to his apartments in the hotel, he found Constance awaiting his return. She was employing her leisure in finishing the portrait of Stephanie; and her husband, immediately perceiving in what work she had been engaged, as she threw down her pencil on his appearance, embraced her,—saying, "When that portrait is finished, Constance, you shall send it to my friend Jules, who will appreciate it as that of a wife whom he has at last been brought to understand and to love."

"When your experiment has succeeded, Etienne!" exclaimed the delighted young lady; "and I am rejoiced on Stephanie's account—yes, and on that of her husband likewise. But sit down, and give me the promised explanations."

"A few words will suffice," responded the Marquis. "Last evening, Jules made certain confessions to me, by which I found that he had become infatuated by the syren charms of another. From all that he said, I felt convinced he was in the power of a designing woman; and you will not be angry with me, Constance, when I state that in order to save my friend, I was resolved to see this female—inasmuch as I knew that I could judge of her without the bias which sat like a spell on the mind of the Viscount. It was arranged that he should introduce me to her to-day. It has been done; and the result is the complete severance of the two—the breaking off of a connexion which so nearly proved fatal to his happiness—and the opening of his eyes to the full understanding of his wife's affectionate disposition. You are not angry, dearest Constance——"

"Angry, Etienne!" she exclaimed eagerly and half reproachfully: "how can I be angry with you? You have acted as a friend to a friend; and by *this* do I signify my approval:"—at the same time imprinting a kiss upon his cheek.

"And now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "I have to speak to you on a matter altogether different—and—and—totally unconnected with the other topic. You remember the solemn promise——"

"Juliana!" exclaimed Constance: "you have met her?"

"Accident has revealed to me her abode——"

"And you have seen her?" cried the younger sister vehemently.

"Yes—I have seen her—and I have promised that you also shall see her."

"At once!" cried the Marchioness, starting up from her seat by her husband's side: "let me hasten at once to embrace Juliana!"

"Calm yourself," said the Marquis: "it is not until the evening that you are to call upon her."

"And why not? wherefore this delay?" exclaimed Constance, cruelly disappointed.

"It is her wish. She was overpowered at the thought of meeting you again, under altered circumstances——"

"And tell me, Etienne—is she happy? But no—she cannot be—it is impossible——Alas, my poor sister!"

Constance burst into tears; and Villebelle did all he could to console her. He had dreaded lest it should strike her that Juliana was the syren of whom he had spoken as the beguiler of Jules de Chateauneuf; and he was happy to perceive that his wife entertained not this suspicion. No: for Constance would have thought, if the idea had struck her at all, that her husband could scarcely have been so guarded; and that by some look or word, he would have betrayed the fact of that identity. Her impression therefore was that it was a mere coincidence, his having fallen in with Juliana at the same time he was bent on his generous purpose on behalf of Chateauneuf.

It was about six o'clock in the evening that the Marquis and Marchioness proceeded in a carriage to the village of Auteuil. It was not Villebelle's intention to accompany Constance into Juliana's presence: he thought that the two sisters would rather be alone at such an interview. He therefore intimated to his wife that he purposed to remain for her in the carriage,—at the same time giving her to understand that she need not abridge her visit to Juliana on that account.

The vehicle stopped at the gate of the villa: the bell was rung—and Madame Durand herself came forth. She had evidently received her instructions from Juliana: for in answer to the inquiry of the Marquis, she immediately said, "The lady is gone: she departed two or three hours back."

"Gone!" ejaculated Constance, in a tone of anguish. "But she has left some letter—some message——"

"Yes—this letter," answered Madame Durand, presenting a sealed note at the same time.

Constance tore it open; and by the light of the lamp at the gateway, she read the following lines:—

"Do not be angry with me, dearest sister, that I have resolved not to meet you at present. The circumstances under which we should thus encounter each other, would be too painful for me. Mistrust not however the love that I bear for you:—and may you be happy! I go into some other seclusion, afar from Paris—and whence in a short time I will write to you. By the date at which you will reach Naples—as I see by the newspapers when you are likely to be there—you shall find a letter awaiting you. Farewell, dearest sister; and remember me kindly to the Marquis.

"JULIANA."

It was with sad and mournful feelings that Constance accompanied her husband back to the hotel at Paris: but probably his impression was that under all circumstances it was better Juliana should have adopted such a course.

CHAPTER CLIII.

THE PURSUER AND THE FUGITIVES.

THREE weeks had now elapsed since the liberation of Lord Saxondale from Dr. Ferney's house in Conduit Street, Hanover Square. The physician, on discovering the flight of the young nobleman at an early hour on the ensuing morning, had sped off to Saxondale House to acquaint her ladyship with the circumstance, and to assure her that he himself was perfectly innocent of any connivance in the matter. Lady Saxondale was at first stupified: for she saw at a glance what an immense advantage the incident would give her daughter-

in-law Adelaide, in case Edmund should return to his wife and in all things make common cause with her. Her ladyship did not reproach Dr. Ferney: she knew his character too well not to be at once convinced that he gave her the right version of Edmund's escape,—the evidence being that it was effected by some person or persons entering the house in the night. But even without such evidence, Lady Saxondale was well aware that the physician would not deceive her—and that if even altering his mind, and refusing any longer to keep Edmund a prisoner, he would deal candidly with her.

That the Count de St. Gerard had by some means succeeded in tracing out the place to which Edmund was removed, and that through this young nobleman's intervention her son had been rescued from confinement, Lady Saxondale did not doubt. But little it mattered by whom or by what means the release was effected, since the mischief was done; and Lady Saxondale was not the woman to lose valuable time in speculations on that point, nor in vain regrets when some positive mode of action was required. For if the reader will bear in mind those explanations which were given at the time when Lady Saxondale and her daughter-in-law were first brought together, it will speedily become evident that the fact of Edmund being at liberty, materially altered all her ladyship's plans, and placed her in a more perilous position than ever. She could not now institute a suit in the Ecclesiastical Courts for the annulment of her son's marriage with the Baroness de Charlemont,—inasmuch as by obtaining from the guardians a written guarantee to allow Adelaide two thousand a-year, and by assigning to her the castle in Lincolnshire as her abiding-place, a virtual recognition of that alliance had been given. What, therefore, was Lady Saxondale's position? Just this:—that in about a year and a half Edmund would come of age—she would be reduced to a mere cypher, having no farther control over the immense revenues of the house of Saxondale—having no right even, unless with his permission, to set foot across the threshold of either the mansion in Park Lane or the Lincolnshire country-seat—reduced to a jointure of some three thousand a-year—and what would be worse than all, compelled to behold her daughter-in-law Adelaide, whom she hated, occupying the high place which she herself had so long enjoyed! This was the position to which Lady Saxondale would find herself reduced,—unless by fresh machinations she could contrive to get her son Edmund completely into her power, and obtain the fullest and completest influence over him.

All these matters were duly weighed and considered by Lady Saxondale immediately on receiving the intelligence of her son's escape: or rather, we should say, so soon afterwards as she could compose herself for such serious and painful meditation. But it was not very long ere her ladyship became sufficiently tranquillized to envisage her position calmly; and her resolves were speedily taken.

She sent at once for Lord Harold Staunton, and addressed him in the following manner:—

"Edmund has escaped: it is of the utmost consequence that he should be again got into my power. For this purpose I am about to leave London. Do you on your part lose no time in getting that woman Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. You and I, Harold, have now each to play a part upon which much depends; you must not sleep over your work, as I assuredly shall not be caught slumbering at mine. My belief is that Edmund has gone to rejoin his wife, who is in Lincolnshire. Thither shall I proceed under circumstances of becoming caution: but if it be necessary, I will write to you. At all events lose no time in carrying out that which you have undertaken to perform; and if it should transpire that Edmund has remained in London, and accident should throw him in your way, do your best to renew all your former intimacy with him—worm yourself into his confidence—make yourself necessary to him,—you know how to do it,—and then we shall determine what future measures to adopt."

Lord Harold Staunton,—who was once again entirely enmeshed in the trammels which his own self-interest as well as his passion for Lady Saxondale wove around him,—promised full compliance with her injunctions; and assured her that so soon as his arrangements could be accomplished, he would make the attempt to get Madge Somers away from Deveril's house. Lady Saxondale then set off privately into Lincolnshire,—travelling by a post-chaise without any attendants, and under an assumed name. On her arrival in the county where the castle was situated, she would not go to Gainsborough, as she was too well known there; and she calculated that if Edmund had really rejoined his wife at the castle, they would both be upon the alert and would not fail to take measures for obtaining prompt information in case new dangers should threaten. Therefore Lady Saxondale went to Lincoln; and thence she despatched a person to make inquiries privately and cautiously in the neighbourhood of the castle to ascertain whether Edmund and Adelaide were resident there. The emissary returned to Lincoln, with the intelligence that Lord Saxondale had been to the castle—that he only stayed there an hour or two—and then departed with his wife. They were attended only by Adelaide's own maid; and no one at the castle knew whither they had gone.

Lady Saxondale was much annoyed at these tidings: for she had no great difficulty in fathoming the plans of her son and her daughter-in-law—and she knew that however silly and thoughtless he might be, his wife was an astute and cunning creature, who would give him the best counsel and adopt the most fitting measures to enable him to baffle any fresh designs against his liberty.

"Doubtless," said Lady Saxondale to herself, "they will seek some profound seclusion, where they hope to remain undiscovered and unmolested until Edmund shall be of age and then become his own master. Perhaps they may go upon the Continent?—and that will render matters all the more difficult for me to disentangle. But I am not to be beaten: and now the first thing to be done, is to get if possible upon the track which they took when so stealthily and hurriedly leaving the castle."

As they were no longer at the castellated mansion, there was nothing to prevent Lady Saxondale herself from proceeding thither: and accordingly the domestics were much astonished when she sud-

denly arrived in a post-chaise, unattended and alone. It was not however Lady Saxondale's purpose to tarry for any length of time at the castle: she immediately instituted inquiries amongst the servants in respect to the mode of Lord Saxondale's departure with his wife. She learnt that it was about one in the afternoon, three days previously, that he had arrived there in a post-chaise, which was immediately dismissed—that having been closeted for about an hour with Adelaide, he had given instructions for the carriage to be got in readiness—and that the equipage had borne him, his wife, and the maid, to Gainsborough, whence it had been sent back from the hotel at which they had halted in that town.

Armed with this information, to Gainsborough did Lady Saxondale forthwith repair; and continuing her inquiries, she ascertained that the fugitives had departed in a post-chaise for Chesterfield. Once upon the track, Lady Saxondale was determined not to abandon it; and she accordingly continued her travels. For several days did she thus journey, tracing the fugitives from Chester to Derby—from Derby to Shrewsbury—from Shrewsbury into Montgomeryshire: and there the trail was lost. Notwithstanding the minuteness and the unwearied perseverance with which her inquiries were followed up, she was thrown completely off the scent. But inasmuch as she had reached a point where the clue suddenly ceased, she came to the conclusion that those whom she sought were not very far distant. Perhaps they had settled somewhere in that part of Wales? At all events, she ceased to fear that they had gone abroad: for if such had been their intention, they would not have come in a direction diametrically opposite to the sea-ports whence the Continent was to be attained—unless indeed, fearing pursuit, they had thus come out of their way to throw the pursuers completely out. But despite the probability of such a proceeding, especially as Edmund was now advised by one so shrewd and cunning as Adelaide, —Lady Saxondale clung to the belief that they had located themselves somewhere in Wales.

Altogether three weeks had elapsed since the escape of the young nobleman from Dr. Ferney's house: and it was the commencement of the dark gloomy month of December. Wearied with her fruitless inquiries—well nigh worn out and exhausted by her travels and wanderings—Lady Saxondale resolved to return to London. The erratic life which for these three weeks she led, had only enabled her to write once to Lord Harold, and to receive one letter in reply. This letter informed her that he had not as yet found an opportunity of carrying into execution his scheme with regard to Madge Somers; for that William Deveril was almost always at the villa, and it was next to impossible to attempt anything while he was there to protect the invalid. Harold however assured Lady Saxondale that he had spies constantly watching the house—that he himself had taken a lodging in the neighbourhood, so as to be on the alert at any moment when an opportunity for action should present itself—and, that an old gardener employed on Deveril's premises, was secretly in his pay and would give whatsoever information was requisite. In respect to Madge Somers herself, Lord Harold's letter informed Lady Saxondale that the woman had experienced a relapse—that she had been again at death's door —that she was but slowly recovering—that the faculty of speech was still absent—and that she had not strength sufficient to renew her former endeavours to write anything upon a slate. Thus no positive injury had been sustained by Lady Saxondale's interests on account of this delay in getting the woman surreptitiously spirited off from Deveril's villa.

The receipt of this letter, while she was yet in Montgomeryshire, put an end to her ladyship's suspense as to what might be doing in London; and thinking it just possible that some fresh intelligence might have been received at the castle of her son's movements with his wife and the maid, she resolved to take Lincolnshire on her way back to London.

But in the meanwhile, what had Edmund and Adelaide been really doing? The reader has seen that immediately on his arrival at Saxondale Castle after his escape from the physician's house in London, he had held a consultation with his wife; and, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, Adelaide counselled him to go into some strict retirement until he should come of age. While the horrors of incarceration were still fresh in Edmund's mind, he needed no large amount of persuasion to induce him to adopt this course. Adelaide was not anxious to return to France: Edmund disliked travelling on the Continent; and therefore it was resolved to settle themselves in Wales. They travelled post, until they reached a certain town in Montgomeryshire, where they dismissed the chaise. At the same time they removed to another hotel in this same town—adopted another name than the fictitious one which they had borne on their arrival—and from this second hotel they proceeded by a public conveyance to another town. Thus was it that they successfully broke off the clue which, until that point, Lady Saxondale had skilfully followed up.

They settled in a small but comfortable house in the neighbourhood of that town at which they definitively halted; and for the first fortnight the change of scene, although it was the drear winter season, was sufficient to amuse Edmund's mind—especially as his wife lavished upon him all those blandishing cajoleries which she was so well enabled to exercise, and which she used for the purpose of rivetting the chains which her beauty had from the very first cast around him. But at the expiration of that fortnight Edmund was suddenly seized with a deep disgust for the monotony of the life he was leading. A capricious change of this kind was quite consistent with his shallow intellect and frivolous ideas. He could not bear living under the plain name of Mr. Jones—being no longer "my-lorded"—having no servants to wait deferentially upon him—forced by the circumstances of the place to drink wines and partake of fare which were sorry enough for one accustomed to have his appetite pampered—no carriage nor horses—and the scenery not merely wearing the aspect of sameness, but likewise a bleak wintry dreariness around him. Even the very local circulating library itself was deficient in attractions for one of his capacity: and the only source of cheering thoughts was to be found in the blandishments of his wife. But even in respect to her, certain cold shuddering alarms

would again steal upon him—the same as those he had experienced when they were at Saxondale House; and as his mind became more and more desponding, those vague apprehensions grew more potent. Thus, by the time two short weeks had elapsed, Edmund felt that he could endure this monotony of existence no longer. It had already become insupportable.

Adelaide, who watched him constantly, failed not to comprehend what was passing within him; and she saw that it would be useless for her to endeavour to keep him in that seclusion any longer. Another consultation was accordingly held; and Edmund vowed that he would dare all dangers and go up to London. Adelaide suggested that it would perhaps be more prudent to return to the castle. There they could not possibly be taken by surprise, if a good look-out were kept: the domestics of the household were numerous—and the emissaries of a mad-doctor, instead of accomplishing their purpose, might be plunged for their pains into the Trent. Besides, Edmund might find amongst the gentry around some little society: for Adelaide thought that, in the country, persons would be less particular than in London, and that the zeal with which English people pay homage to a lord would induce them to turn a deaf ear to any flying rumours which might be in circulation with regard to the said lord's wife. Moreover, now that the first impressions of alarm in respect to the mad-house had passed away, neither Edmund nor Adelaide much fancied that Lady Saxondale would revert to the same proceeding. At all events, they could be upon their guard, as before said; and one of the first steps to be taken on their return to the castle, might be to write a letter to her ladyship, advising her for her own sake to abstain from hostilities in future, unless she wished an open warfare to arise and certain unpleasant revelations to be made in respect to herself.

Under all these circumstances therefore, the result of the consultation was a resolve to retrace their way to Saxondale Castle. They set out—they travelled by easy stages—and it was on a dark December evening that they once more crossed the threshold of the castellated mansion. When Edmund again found himself seated in the spacious, handsomely furnished, and well lighted dining-room—at a board served with a succulent repast, and the choicest wines sparkling upon the table—he felt as blithe and happy as a school-boy on his first day at home for the holidays. Nor was Adelaide herself sorry to be once more in that palatial residence—with troops of servants at her command—equipages ready at her bidding—and the treatment she experienced being that of a lady of title.

On the second day after their return—and at about eleven in the forenoon—as Edmund and Adelaide were deliberating together how they should while away the time till dinner, a post-chaise rolled up to the gate of the castle. In a few minutes one of the domestics who had received special instructions to be on the look out, hurried up to the room where Edmund and his wife were seated. The man rushed in somewhat unceremoniously, to announce that Lady Saxondale had just arrived.

"I will not see her!" exclaimed Edmund, starting to his feet from the sofa on which he was lounging by Adelaide's side.

"Is her ladyship alone?" inquired his wife: and on receiving an answer in the affirmative, she said in a hurried whisper to her husband, "Yes, let us see her. Perhaps she comes to propose some terms? At all events if she be alone, she is harmless."

"Well then, we will see her," cried Edmund aloud: and the domestic hastened away.

In a few minutes the door was thrown open; and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. She looked somewhat pale and haggard from excitement of mind and body—but yet not so much altered nor worn as most other women under such circumstances would have been: for she was of great physical capacity of endurance, as well as of being endowed with strong mental power. She entered with a composed but severe look; and Adelaide, who was deeply skilled in reading the human heart through the medium of the countenance, at once saw that she had some sternly settled purpose in view. Edmund was not enabled thus deeply to fathom the state of his mother's mind; and he surveyed her with an air of mingled mockery and supercilious contempt. Slowly and deliberately she put off her bonnet and shawl, and took a seat. More than a minute thus elapsed from the moment she entered the room—and not a word was spoken by either one of the three.

"I have been seeking you both," at length said Lady Saxondale, in a voice that was coldly calm and as severe as her looks; "and it was only at an early hour this morning I learnt that you had returned two days ago to the castle."

"Well, mother," ejaculated Edmund, with a tone and manner which under any other circumstances might be described as flippantly insolent, but which was really nothing more than what such a parent deserved, and indeed might expect on the part of such a son,—"what business is it of your's when we come or when we go? Now, I just tell you my mind. Your conduct towards me has been shameful; and if I were to lock you up for the next six months on bread and water, in one of the tapestry-chambers, or even in the chapel itself, I should be only serving you right. However, you had better take care what tricks you play me in future: for I vow and protest that I will pay you off in a coin you won't like!"

"Cease this impertinence," said Lady Saxondale, in a peremptory tone.

"But you, madam," exclaimed Adelaide, now firing up, "must fully comprehend that you are not permitted to give yourself these airs in our presence."

"And you, madam, understand," returned Lady Saxondale, drawing herself up with the haughtiest dignity, "that you are both of you only in this castle by sufferance—that for the present it is mine, or at least under my control—and that the domestics will obey whatsoever order I choose to give them."

"There may be two words to that!" exclaimed Edmund. "If you like to try it on, mother, we will just ring the bell; and when I order the first footman who comes, to turn you out, we will see whether I am obeyed or not."

"I was fully prepared for some such insolence as

this from you, young viper that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, for an instant losing the command of her temper.

"Viper—eh?" echoed Edmund. "If you want to see who can best call each other hard names, I don't mind giving you a specimen of my ability, by telling you that you are nothing better than a demirep; and you might as well take yourself off to William Deveril or Lord Harold—and perhaps a dozen others, for anything I know."

Lady Saxondale's countenance became scarlet—and her lips moved as if she were about to give vent to some strong ejaculation: but catching back, as it were, the word ere uttered—and at the same time exerting the strongest power of control over her feelings, she said, "I have but a very few words to say: you will both do well to listen; and perhaps the communication I purpose to make, will convince you that I am not to be insulted with impunity. Now let us bandy not these idle taunts. I can assure you that the syllables I am about to utter, are fraught with more importance than you may possibly imagine."

"We are all attention," said Adelaide, glancing with rapid significancy at Edmund, as much as to make him understand that it were better to allow his mother to have her say.

"Yes," continued Lady Saxondale: "matters have come to such a point that I am resolved to bring them to a settlement in one way or another, without an hour's delay. You two, no doubt, hug the belief that in a short time—in less than a year and a half from the present date—I shall suddenly become altogether powerless; that I shall sink into a mere cypher, and ye will be dominant! Now, that is a position which I am not at all prepared to accept; and sooner than look forward to such ignominy, I would bring the whole fabric of grandeur, wealth, and titles, crashing and crumbling in ruins upon the heads of us all."

Edmund gave a supercilious toss of his head: but Adelaide, laying her hand on his knee, said, "Hush!"—for she saw plainly enough that Lady Saxondale was speaking with too solemn a seriousness, and likewise with too much cold desperation in her resolve, not to have the inward consciousness of being enabled to perform that which she threatened. Lord Saxondale accordingly held his peace; and his mother went on in the following manner:—

"There is a secret which my soul has hitherto treasured up as a criminal would hold fast the tale of his guilt! It is a secret which——"

At this moment the sounds of numerous voices talking beneath the windows, reached the ears of the three persons in the apartment where this scene was taking place; and so loud—with so much apparent excitement too were those voices discoursing—that Edmund started up, exclaiming, "What is that?"

Going to the window, he looked forth—and beheld a number of the servants, male and female, gathered beneath the casement; and in the midst of them was a man in the dress of a peasant, displaying some kind of garment which he held up, so that it floated out at full length.

"What on earth can this mean?" ejaculated Edmund, who, in his silly curiosity, had for the moment lost sight of the very grave and serious manner in which his mother had just been speaking.

"Return to your seat, dear Edmund," said Adelaide: "never mind what is taking place elsewhere."

"But here is something very odd going on!" he exclaimed. "The servants all gathered together—a labouring man amongst them——What the deuce is it? He is holding up a woman's gown, I declare! Ah, what is it they say?—— '*Found in the river?*'"

Lady Saxondale now hurried to the window, as if she had more curiosity than her daughter-in-law Adelaide, who only proceeded thither more leisurely—doubtless thinking that whatsoever might be going on was of very trivial importance indeed. Lady Saxondale had scarcely flung forth a glance from that casement, when she turned abruptly round, saying, "Something extraordinary has occurred: I must see what it is."

"And I will go too," cried Edmund, following close behind Lady Saxondale as she hurried forth from the room.

Adelaide remained behind, ashamed at the idea of displaying what she conceived to be a childish curiosity, and wondering that Lady Saxondale could possibly do so. Her ladyship was hurrying—indeed rushing most swiftly down the stairs,—when she caught the sounds of Edmund's footsteps behind her. All in an instant she stopped short and seizing the young nobleman by the arm with a convulsive violence of touch, she looked at him with a deadly pallor of countenance,—and said in a low hoarse whisper, "Edmund, if you recognise anything, I charge you to remain silent! Speak not a word—betray not the fact by a look—treat it with seeming indifference; and I swear to you that, as a recompense, I will do all that you wish—all that you ask! I will attempt to coerce you no more!"

Edmund gazed upon his mother with a sort of stupid astonishment: he really and truly thought for a moment she was suddenly going mad. The pallor of her countenance was absolutely ghastly: her eyes had a fixed and sinister stare: her ashy lips were quivering: she seemed as if she trembled all over with a glacial chill. In this fearful aspect which she wore, there was something too terribly real—too awfully genuine—not to smite him with the conviction that so far from being mad, she was keenly and poignantly intelligent to the imminence of some dreadful danger: and catching the infection of her own dire alarm—losing for the moment, in the bewilderment of his senses, the full meaning of the words which she had just addressed to him—he said, "Good God! mother, what is it?"

"Be calm, Edmund—be calm—be composed!" was the quick response she gave in a deep hollow voice, while her fingers closed rigidly upon his arm, as if that arm were grasped with claws of iron. "Be calm, I say! Not a word to Adelaide!—not a word, I conjure you! Listen, Edmund—dear Edmund! do me this service—and I will never molest you more. Pray, pray forgive me for the past——And now come—let us go down together. You will recognise something — for God's sake appear *not* to recognise it!"

Lord Saxondale could not give utterance to a syllable: he was still half bewildered and half astounded by this awful change which had suddenly come over her ladyship, and by those words to which she had given such rapid and excited

utterance, though in so hollow and subdued a tone. He proceeded down the stairs mechanically:—at the bottom she caught him by the arm again, and said hurriedly, "Adelaide is coming! Not a word! Remember my promise! I swear to fulfil it!"

Edmund's wife, on a second thought, had conceived that there must be something more in all this than she had at first imagined; and she accordingly decided upon following her husband and mother-in-law down the stairs. The sounds of her footsteps had thus reached Lady Saxondale's ears, and made her breathe this last adjuration, full of vehement entreaty, though low in utterance, in the ear of her son. Almost immediately afterwards they were overtaken by Adelaide, who exclaimed, "Wherefore all this excitement?"

"We do not know—we are going to see," responded Lady Saxondale, without turning her head round towards Adelaide, but now speaking in her natural voice once more.

"Yes, we are going to see," added Edmund, still so much bewildered as scarcely to know what he did say.

The three traversed the great hall, and emerged forth from the front-door which was standing open. A little way on the right of the entrance-steps, stood the group of domestics, male and female, with the peasant in the midst; and this last-mentioned individual was displaying the long garment, which indeed was nothing more nor less than a lady's gown. But that dress——Ah! it was instaneously recognised by Lord Saxondale, stained, soiled, and dripping with water though it were. It was the masquerade costume which he knew that his mother had once worn!

Edmund—now all in a moment comprehending the meaning of Lady Saxondale's words—threw upon her a look of quick significancy, and thus met her appealing eyes as they were turned upon him.

CHAPTER CLIV.

THE MASQUERADE-DRESS.

THE servants and the peasant were all talking at the moment Edmund, his mother, and his wife, issued from the entrance-hall: but on beholding them, their voices suddenly ceased through a feeling of respectful deference. Edmund said nothing: Adelaide gazed with curiosity: and Lady Saxondale, with her usual air of perfect composure, inquired, "What is all this excitement about?"

"Please your ladyship," answered the peasant, "I just now dragged this out of the river. I was going along the bank at a very little distance from the castle t'other side"—and he pointed in the Gainsborough direction—"when I saw something that looked like a woman's dress; and I was at first afraid it was a female drowned. So I waded in, and drew out this gown. It had some string round it; and what seemed to be some little bits of thick paper just sticking to the string. Leastways I took it to be paper: but it all came off in my hand——However, here's the dress; and a very fine one it must have been, though the mud has soiled it and the water has taken out the colour."

"One would think it had been a masquerading dress," observed Lucilla the lady's-maid: but the remark was thrown forth without any sinister intent, as she was perfectly ignorant that her mistress had ever worn such a costume.

"But I tell your ladyship what," continued the peasant, "as I have been already telling your ladyship's servants. I recollect perfectly well that one of those poor young women——"

"Edmund, it is very cold out here," said Lady Saxondale, turning quickly to her son, but darting upon him a significant look at the same time. "Let us go into the hall, and hear what the man has to say."

With these words she took the young nobleman's arm; and as they ascended the entrance-steps together, she breathed in a hurried and scarcely audible whisper, "For heaven's sake, Edmund, as little emotion as possible!"

"Don't be afraid," was Lord Saxondale's immediate response, also quickly whispered: for now that the first access of excitement had gone by, he comprehended that by some means or another his mother was completely in his power; and though he could not at the moment precisely settle his thoughts as to the full meaning of her alarm, he was nevertheless already smitten with some dark and dreadful suspicion.

Adelaide was too keen not to observe something peculiar on the part of her husband and her mother-in-law,—especially as she had noticed that rapid exchange of significant glances which had taken place the instant Edmund's eyes had encountered the saturated garment. And then Lucilla's observation, that it looked like a masquerade-costume, had brought, like a lightning-flash, a recollection to Adelaide's mind. For she had heard from Edmund's lips the whole story of the masquerade at the Duke and Duchess of Harcourt's,—how Lady Saxondale had met Lord Harold Staunton there—and how she had incited him to provoke William Deveril to a duel. She had likewise learnt how Edmund had ransacked his mother's boxes to discover that dress—and how he had succeeded: but she never knew that it had fallen into the hands of the unfortunate Emily Archer, *alias* Mademoiselle d'Alembert—for the simple reason that Lord Saxondale had thought fit to conceal from his wife the fact that he had possessed such a charming mistress. However, Adelaide saw, as we have already said, that there was something very peculiar in the present affair: but she made no observation—neither by her looks did she betray what was passing in her mind.

Lady Saxondale, leaning upon Edmund's arm, passed into the hall,—Adelaide following close—the peasant, with the dripping garment, and the domestics crowding in the rear.

"Yes, assuredly it is a masquerade-dress," said the butler, as the peasant now stretched the costume on the marble pavement.

"I was about to tell your ladyship," said this labouring man, "what my opinion is. It was at the cottage where I live with my mother and sister, that those two unfortunate women stopped for a little while that night when they were murdered——"

Here Adelaide could scarcely repress a sudden start: for all that had hitherto struck her as extraordinary in Lady Saxondale's behaviour, in a

moment associated itself with the tragedy thus revealed by the last few words the labouring man had spoken. From beneath her long lashes she darted a quick glance at her mother-in-law; and her power of penetration showed her at once that the cold outward composure which her ladyship wore, was merely a mask concealing poignant feelings of trouble and agitation that were working within. But Adelaide still remained silent; and instantaneously regaining complete command over herself, she continued to listen with merely an appearance of such curiosity as one might naturally feel under such circumstances.

"And I noticed," continued the peasant, "that the one who seemed the servant girl, carried a large parcel done up in brown paper, and tied round with string. Now, when the bodies were discovered murdered on the bank of the river, the parcel had disappeared; and this was proved on the inquest. I really do believe the dress that lies there was what the parcel contained. It seems that the servant's mistress was a theatre-dancer, or something of that sort; and so perhaps she was accustomed to wear this very identical dress. Depend upon it, my lady, that my opinion isn't far wrong."

"Perhaps not," said Lady Saxondale, with the appearance of her wonted calmness. "But the incident is of no consequence now: it cannot assist in the discovery——"

But here she stopped short; and stooping down, affected to examine the texture of the wet garment.

"Please your ladyship, with due deference," suggested the butler, "I think this incident ought to be made known to a magistrate."

"And please your ladyship," added the steward, "such is my idea. The murder was as mysterious as it was horrible; and everything at all connected with it, must of necessity be made public."

"Besides," continued the butler, "there are instances where police-officers are so uncommon sharp, that the slightest clue puts them on the right scent—and a new link in a chain serves as a guide to the detection of the guilty ones."

"Yes," said the peasant: "I am determined to go to some justice-of-the-peace, and tell him what I have found. It can do no harm if it does no good. Besides, it would seem as if the thing sat heavy on my conscience, if I didn't do so. Let me see—who's the nearest justice—Mr. Denison or Mr. Hawkshaw? By the bye, I have got a call to make in the direction of Hawkshaw Hall; and so I'll go straight off there at once."

An expression of trouble, which she could not possibly subdue, passed over the features of Lady Saxondale, as the labouring man thus spoke. The servants all beheld that look on the part of their mistress: but they every one attributed it to a feeling of mingled annoyance and shame at the mention of the name of Hawkshaw, which they naturally supposed must vividly bring back to her mind the dread exposure of that day when the intended twofold wedding was interrupted and cut short. Edmund likewise observed that look, and it strengthened the dark suspicion which had already arisen in his mind; while Adelaide, more prompt to jump at an extreme conclusion, felt her own suspicion fully confirmed.

"Well, my good fellow," said Lord Saxondale, thinking it better to put a stop to this matter, if possible, "I don't know that you need trouble Squire Hawkshaw——Just leave the dress here, and I'll deliberate what is to be done with it."

"Beg your lordship's pardon," replied the peasant; "but this is a matter for a justice to sift. I should have gone straight off with it at once: only just as I dragged it out of the river, the steward was passing along—and as we got talking on the subject, I came as far as the castle. No offence, my lord, for not taking your lordship's advice: but where murder has been done, no good ever comes of keeping a thing in one's own hands—and I sha'n't feel easy in my mind till I have delivered this dress up to a justice."

"Well, my good man, have your own way," interrupted Lady Saxondale. "I see that you are very wet—you have been in the water. Go to the servants' hall, and get some refreshments before you set out on your walk."

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale turned away, beckoning Edmund and Adelaide to follow her; and she began ascending the stair-case. Her son did at once accompany her: but his wife lingered in the hall; and as the domestics were moving away in company with the peasant, who had rolled up the dress, and whom they were conducting to their own premises to give him some refreshments,—Adelaide beckoned Lucilla towards her.

"What dreadfuld murder was this, my girl," she inquired, "to which allusion has been made? I never heard of it before; and I know that my lord and her ladyship will give me no particulars, for fear of frightening me."

"Ah, my lady," responded Lucilla, naturally supposing that she was thus questioned through mere ordinary curiosity on the part of Adelaide; "it was indeed a shocking thing. Let me see? It happened four or five months back——To be sure! Lady Macdonald and Lady Florina Staunton were staying at the castle——Yes, and Lord Harold too——"

"Ah! Lord Harold Staunton was staying here at the time—was he?"

"Yes, my lady. I recollect he was ill in bed: he had been thrown from one of Mr. Hawkshaw's horses, which he would persist in riding. It was very mad of his lordship, you know, when he was implored not to do it: for the horse was a very spirited one——"

"Well, but about this dreadful tragedy," said Adelaide.

"Dreadful indeed, my lady! The victims were an opera-dancer and her servant——the dancer's name was Mademoiselle d'Alembert: but if I recollect right, her real one was Emily Archer; and she was a splendid creature, as I have heard say. Well, my lady, they were both found shot dead on the bank of the river—one through the brain, the other through the heart——"

"And was this in the middle of the night?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh, no—not in the middle of the night. About ten o'clock, as near as I can recollect."

"And where were they going?"

"Ah! that nobody knows," responded Lucilla. "It was thought at the time——"

But here she stopped short, perceiving the immense error she was about to commit, and into which she had almost been inadvertently betrayed

in the somewhat excited state of her thoughts under the influence of those horrible recollections which had been so forcibly brought back to her mind.

"What were you going to say, Lucilla?" inquired Adelaide.

"Oh! nothing, my lady——"

"Nonsense! you were about to say something. Speak candidly: there is naught to which you can give utterance in respect to the present topic, that will offend me."

"I would rather not, my lady. I was foolish—very foolish," responded Lucilla, becoming every instant more and more confused.

"Now I beg that you will speak candidly," said Adelaide. "Nay, I command you. Proceed: do not be afraid of giving me offence."

"Well, my lady, since you order——but pray don't mention to his lordship——I would not for the world make mischief——indeed, I would rather not say any more——"

"Lucilla, this is foolish. Proceed."

"Well, to be sure, it was before my lord was acquainted with your ladyship; and so there's no harm done."

"What is it?" demanded Adelaide impatiently. "Do not trifle with me thus."

"I was only going to observe, my lady, that if his lordship did really know something of Emily Archer——I suppose young noblemen will be gay now and then——"

"To be sure! I comprehend you. Of course it has nothing to do with me. This unfortunate Emily Archer was intimate, you mean, with Lord Saxondale? Don't be frightened, Lucilla: you have not offended me—and I shall not mention that I have learnt anything from you. But I suppose his lordship was not here at the castle when the murder took place?"

"Oh! no, my lady: he was in London, and had not been here for some time. His lordship never liked the castle: it was too dull——"

"But where was it thought that the two women were going at the time?" inquired Adelaide.

"Well, my lady, it was whispered that Miss Emily Archer and her maid were coming to the castle for some purpose or another."

"Why was it thought so?"

"Oh, for several reasons. In the first place," continued Lucilla, "what could they have possibly been doing in the neighbourhood between nine and ten at night, unless they *were* coming to the castle? They were stopping at an hotel at Gainsborough at the time. Then again, what could they have come into Lincolnshire at all for, except to see her ladyship, or else in the hope of finding Lord Saxondale down here? Perhaps, my lady, his lordship may have turned neglectful in London——But there is yet another reason why I think they were coming to the castle."

"And that reason?" said Adelaide.

"Why, my lady, the very day before the one in the evening of which the murder took place, a post-chaise drove up to the castle—a lady got out—and her maid remained in the vehicle. The lady gave no name, and said it was useless, as she was not known to Lady Saxondale; but she had a long interview with her ladyship, and then went away. It never struck any of us at the time that this lady and her maid who were murdered, might have been the very same that came to the castle: but some days after the inquest, when we read in the county papers full particulars and descriptions, we thought they must be the same. Of course you know it was not for her ladyship to go to the inquest and say anything about the matter: because it was rather a delicate subject in respect to my lord;—and whether or not the females were the same who called at the castle, and whether or not they were again coming here in the evening when they were killed, had nothing to do with the circumstance of the murder. Poor things! they were no doubt waylaid by some ruffians."

"No doubt of it," observed Adelaide.

"I hope your ladyship will not mention that I have been talking so much on the subject," said Lucilla, who dearly loved a gossip, but who now began to reflect that she had been speaking very frankly and familiarly indeed to Lord Saxondale's wife upon a topic which was rather of a delicate nature.

"Fear not, Lucilla," responded Adelaide: "it is entirely my own fault that you have been led into these explanations."

Having thus spoken, Adelaide slowly ascended the staircase towards the apartment where she expected to find her mother-in-law and her husband.

But in the meanwhile let us see what had been taking place betwixt these two. It will be remembered that when Lady Saxondale directed the servants to take the peasant along with them and give him some refreshments, she had beckoned her son and her daughter-in-law to follow her up-stairs. Those stairs she ascended mechanically, scarcely knowing what she was doing: for, as Adelaide had but too truthfully suspected, her air of cold outward composure was only a mask which the natural strength of her mind and a sort of desperate courage enabled her to assume in order to conceal the horrible feelings and terrific apprehensions that were agitating in her soul. It was not until Lady Saxondale reached the apartment that she observed her son only was following her, and that Adelaide had remained below.

"Where is your wife?" she said, with nervous quickness, as she turned and threw a strange look upon Edmund.

"I don't know—I thought she was with us," he replied. "I scarcely know what I am thinking or doing——Upon my word, it seems as if I was in the midst of some curious dream! But now, mother, what means all this? Tell me at once——"

"Question me not, Edmund!" she interrupted him, her entire form visibly shaken with a cold tremor, which she could neither repress nor conceal. "Think what you will—but I conjure you keep a seal upon your lips: breathe not a word to a soul—answer no questions which your wife may put—and it will be all to your advantage. I cannot leave the castle immediately—it would look too strange: but in three or four days I will depart—and never more shall you be molested by me. This I solemnly swear."

"Well, at all events it is something gained," observed Edmund: and, then as he felt all his horrible suspicions in respect to his mother fully confirmed, he could not help adding, "But, my God! what made you do *that*?"

"Question me not, I say!" she responded, half in a tone of entreaty, half in one of excited impatience. "Spare me, Edmund! show yourself above wreaking upon me any anger or malice that you may feel on account of the past."

"Just now you called me a viper," said the young nobleman, unable to resist the opportunity of giving vent to that vindictive spitefulness which was natural to him, "and that is a name you have on more than one occasion flung at me. But, look you, mother! whatever I may be, I am not so bad——"

"Silence, Edmund—for heaven's sake silence!" ejaculated her ladyship, her countenance once more becoming absolutely ghastly, and an expression of indescribable horror, mingled with anguish, sweeping over her features. "I am in your power—have mercy upon me! What more can I do than fulfil the promise I have already made you?"

"Well, keep to it—and I will say no more," rejoined the young nobleman: but even as he gazed upon Lady Saxondale, he could not help feeling an ineffable aversion—a strong loathing—a deep sense of horror, at the thought of what she was; for as he himself had said, or had meant to say, he was not so bad as to be enabled to contemplate the darkest criminality unmoved or undismayed.

"Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, suddenly recollecting something, and recoiling in affright from the idea which thus struck her, "have you ever mentioned to Adelaide anything about that dress? ——But, yes! I feel convinced you have—I am sure of it! From all she said when first I met her in London, she knew everything——far, far too much!"

"Of course," responded the young nobleman, with a sort of brutal roughness: "I told Adelaide all I knew—and it was natural enough, as you have been at war with me for some time past."

"Where is Adelaide? what can she be doing? wherefore does she not rejoin us?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, sinking upon a seat, and feeling as if all the courage which had hitherto supported her, must now give way. "Go, Edmund—tell her to come hither at once——"

But at this moment the door opened, and Adelaide entered the room,—she having just come up from her conversation with Lucilla in the hall. The instant the handle of the door moved, Lady Saxondale with a mighty effort regained her outward composure: for she knew not whether it might be one of the servants who was about to enter. But when Adelaide made her appearance, her ladyship's eyes were quickly flung upon her countenance, as if to glean from thence how much her daughter-in-law knew—how much she suspected—and how she intended to bear herself in the matter. Adelaide closed the door; and advancing straight up to Lady Saxondale, said in a voice of firm severity, "Now, will you have the kindness to take up the thread of the discourse where it was just now interrupted?"

"It is unnecessary," answered Lady Saxondale.

"Unnecessary?" ejaculated Adelaide, a smile of scornful triumph for a moment appearing upon her lips: "why has it become unnecessary? On the contrary, it is more necessary than ever that you should reveal that secret to which you so solemnly and seriously alluded; inasmuch as under existing circumstances, it behoves us all to be made aware of the position in which we stand with regard to one another."

"It is needless, I repeat," rejoined Lady Saxondale. "Ask Edmund—he will tell you that he is satisfied with the arrangements entered into between us."

"Madam," resumed Adelaide, fixing a determined look upon Lady Saxondale, "your son cannot trust you—nor can I, as his wife, trust you. You spoke of a secret the revelation of which might, if you chose, in a moment bring down the whole fabric of wealth, titles, and honours crashing and tumbling about our ears——"

"It was a menace—and I recall it," said Lady Saxondale, quivering from head to foot: then in a sort of desperation, she exclaimed, "I am beaten, Adelaide—I renounce the warfare! Henceforth I leave you both unmolested—I will go hence—— What more can you demand?"

"We demand nothing more—it is precisely what we want. But," continued Adelaide, "we have no guarantee that your present demeanour is not assumed for the purpose of throwing us off our guard, the better to carry out fresh perfidies. Now, look you, Lady Saxondale! Between you and me it is diamond cut diamond: and for the interests of your son, which are identical with mine own, we must come to a thorough understanding. Have you forgotten all the revelations which Lord Harold Staunton so unconsciously made to me on that evening when in the dusk of the apartment at Saxondale House he mistook me for yourself?"

"I have forgotten nothing, Adelaide," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, again quivering all over; "and there is no need for you to refresh my memory in a single particular. Edmund, tell her that you are satisfied; and let this cease."

"Edmund will permit me," continued Adelaide, "to place matters on such a footing that henceforth he need not fear you. Listen, Lady Saxondale—do not interrupt me. On that evening to which I have alluded, when Lord Harold Staunton addressed me under the impression that he was speaking to you, he made reference to some deed which had mysteriously but terribly knitted your destinies together; and that deed which I comprehended not *then*, I understand *now!* Lord Harold Staunton was an inmate of this castle at the time when——"

"Adelaide," murmured the unhappy Lady Saxondale, the very picture of abject humiliation and despairing wretchedness,—"I have already besought Edmund to spare me: to you do I address the same prayer."

"You understand, then," said Adelaide, coldly implacable, "that you are in my power. Attempt but a renewal of hostilities against us—make but a sign which shall raise a suspicion that you are still full of perfidy—and——"

"No more!" almost shrieked forth the miserable woman, as she started from her chair. "I understand you—and I will henceforth be your slave, if you will!"

With these words she quitted the room: and repairing to the bed-chamber which she was wont to occupy when at the castle, gave way to thoughts and feelings which may perhaps be better understood than described.

CHAPTER CLV.

THE RAMBLE.

Mr. Hawkshaw was seated with a friend at lunch, in one of the handsome apartments of his residence, and at about two o'clock on the day of which we are writing. This friend was Mr. Denison; and they were conversing together upon a variety of topics,—amongst which the presence of Edmund and his wife in Lincolnshire was included.

"I suppose you have heard," said Denison, "that Lord Saxondale and his bride came back to the castle a day or two ago?"

"Yes," answered Hawkshaw; "and by the bye, have you caught the rumour which is afloat, that Saxondale had been confined in a madhouse?"

"I know that it is true," responded Denison. "A friend of mine, writing to me from London two or three weeks back, mentioned the circumstance: but it appears that he was not many days in confinement—and how he got liberated I have not learnt."

"Ah, it is a strange family—a strange family altogether!" said Mr. Hawkshaw, shaking his head gloomily, as his thoughts at the moment specially reverted to the treacherous attempt of Juliana to inveigle him into a marriage, polluted and unchaste as she was.

"Yes—it is singular," observed Mr. Denison, "that everything unpleasant in connexion with that family, should have come out all at the same time. Here, within a few months, we have had extraordinary evidences of their profligacy or their folly. The mother exposed in respect to Mr. Deveril, and it being likewise tolerably certain that Lord Harold Staunton was her paramour—the deplorable affair in respect to Juliana, in which you, my dear friend, had so lucky an escape—Lord Harold's mysterious, and I might almost say burglarious entry, with some common ruffian, into the castle—Lord Saxondale's monstrous marriage——"

"Monstrous indeed!" ejaculated Hawkshaw: "the epithet is the very best you could have applied to it. But does his wife possibly entertain the hope that she will be received into society by the good families in Lincolnshire?"

"It is very certain," rejoined the Squire's friend, "that neither Mrs. Denison nor any other members of my family, purpose to call at the castle. It may seem hard that a woman who has been acquitted by a jury, should be thus punished by society: it may even savour of unjustifiable vindictiveness on the part of the world; but it is impossible to read the trial without coming to the conclusion that she was really guilty."

"Ah! you have read it, then?" said Hawkshaw. "So have I. It has been published in a work of celebrated criminal trials——"

"The very book in which I myself found the account," observed Denison. "But come, Squire, let us turn the conversation on a more agreeable topic. Tell me candidly," continued the old gentleman, with a smile, "have you not so far recovered your passion for Juliana as to think of committing matrimony in some other quarter?"

"Recovered?" exclaimed Hawkshaw, almost indignantly. "You ought to know, my dear friend, that I was startled up from that dream in the very hour that I obtained the conviction of her tremendous perfidy."

At this moment a footman entered to inform Mr. Hawkshaw that a peasant requested an audience of him in his capacity of a magistrate. The Squire directed that the man should be shown to the library; and luncheon being now over, he said to Mr. Denison, "You may as well come with me, and hear whatsoever the applicant may have to say."

To the library the two gentlemen accordingly repaired; and Hawkshaw immediately recognised the peasant as one of the witnesses who had given evidence at the inquest held upon the two murdered women,—at which inquest, be it remembered, he was present as a spectator. The man now carried a large parcel done up in paper: for we should observe that before quitting Saxondale Castle, he had dried the dress at the fire in the servants' hall, and had then enveloped it in the manner in which he now bore it.

"Well, my good fellow," said Squire Hawkshaw, as he and Mr. Denison took their seats at the table, "what do you want with me?"

The peasant's explanations were speedily given; and as they were the same which have been already recorded, we need not reiterate them. Suffice it to say, he concluded by observing that he did not know whether the incident would in any way assist the course of justice, or enable its officials to resume the clue of the investigations they had made at the time,—but that he considered it to be his duty to bring the case under the cognizance of a magistrate. The parcel was opened—the dress produced—and minutely inspected by Mr. Hawkshaw and Mr. Denison.

"And you say," observed the former, "that you have shown it at Saxondale Castle—and that Lady Saxondale herself is there?"

The peasant replied in the affirmative.

"Then I suppose," continued the Squire, addressing the remark to Denison, "that her ladyship is reconciled to her son and her daughter-in-law? However, in respect to the present business, I do not see that the discovery of this dress will in any way enable the constables at Gainsborough to resume their inquiry. It may, or it may not be, that the dress was contained in the parcel which was proved to have been in the hands of the maid on the fatal evening: but granting it is the same, there are two inferences to be drawn—either that it accidentally rolled into the river when the deed was committed, or that it was flung there by the murderer or murderers as something not worth carrying off."

"This latter inference, Hawkshaw, is scarcely to be deduced," observed Mr. Denison: "for why should the assassin thus seek to dispose of the dress? Would he not have merely tossed it down on the bank, if he did not choose to take it away with him?"

"But in any case I cannot see," remarked Hawkshaw, "that the discovery of this masquerading-gear—for such it evidently is—can be turned to any account in furtherance of the cause of justice."

"Do you recollect," asked Mr. Denison, who was a shrewd and thoughtful man, "whether the bed of the river itself was searched for the weapon or

weapons with which the double murder was accomplished?"

"I don't think it was," answered Hawkshaw: "and indeed I should have fancied that it would have been useless."

"Not so useless as you would imagine," said Mr. Denison. "An assassin frequently flings away the weapon with which his foul deed has been perpetrated; and your own memory must furnish you with several instances of crimes having been thus brought home to their authors."

"I have heard of knives, when stained with blood, being thrown away in the manner you describe," responded the Squire: "but pistols——"

"And why not pistols?" asked Mr. Denison. "Is not one weapon as often gifted with a tell-tale tongue as another?—I mean in respect to its identification as belonging to some particular individual. A murderer throws away his weapon under several influences:—first, in order that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if he be stopped, suspected, and searched: secondly, in the sudden horror which supervenes after the commission of the deed: thirdly, on being alarmed by the sounds of voices or of footsteps. And now that I bethink me, in the case of which we are talking, the murderer or murderers were thus alarmed: for our friend the Marquis of Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were almost instantaneously on the spot. Assuredly it was a great fault if the river was not thoroughly searched at the time."

"Well, I am almost sure that it was not," replied Mr. Hawkshaw: "for I was present at the inquest, and I heard the head-constable of Gainsborough give his evidence, stating all the measures he had adopted to discover some clue. The rain, you recollect, fell in torrents that night; and all foot-marks were obliterated on the soft soil. He looked about for string or brown paper, to discover if possible a clue to the direction which had been taken by the author or authors of the crime after its perpetration; and he found nothing. All these details do I recollect."

"Well then, it will perhaps be useful," observed Mr. Denison, "to give the head-constable a hint; and he may yet have the bed of the river searched for the purpose I have described. You, my good man," added the old gentleman, now addressing himself to the peasant, "can tell him so from me: because the best thing you can do is to take this dress to the head-constable at once. You have acted judiciously and prudently in consulting magisterial authority; and here is a guinea for you."

Mr. Hawkshaw added another; and the peasant took his departure, infinitely delighted with the presents he had thus received. He carried the dress away with him; and returning to his own home, communicated to his mother and sister all that had taken place. Although he had walked many miles, he nevertheless set out again in the evening for Gainsborough, and repaired at once to the residence of the head-constable, to whom he gave every explanation, likewise delivering the message from Mr. Denison to the effect that it would perhaps be as well if the bed of the river were searched in the neighbourhood of the spot where the crime was committed. The constable promised compliance with this suggestion, and assured the peasant that he would consider whether the possession of the masquerade-apparel would in any way further the ends of justice.

On the following morning the constable sent for the female who had been charged at the time of the tragedy to disapparel the corpses of the murdered women; and he desired her to examine the dress minutely, and inform him, to the best of her recollection, whether it would have fitted either the dancer or her servant? In respect to the latter, the woman at once gave a negative response,—the unfortunate abigail having been too slender in figure and too short in stature for such a costume: nor indeed was it probable that she could have had such a dress for her own wearing. The woman examined it for some time; and ultimately pronounced her opinion to the following effect:—

"I perfectly well remember the form and stature of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. She was tall enough to wear this dress, but not sufficiently stout. The costume was evidently made for a woman of considerable development of contours, although the figure must have been of perfect symmetry. The wearer of such a garb would be what is termed a very fine woman."

The next step which the head-constable at Gainsborough took, was to summon to his counsels the most experienced milliner in the town; and he desired her to give her opinion in respect to the raiment,—mentioning certain details on which he sought to be enlightened. The milliner, after minutely examining the dress, and likewise consulting a book of costumes which she possessed, delivered herself in the ensuing manner:—

"This is intended to represent a Spanish costume, belonging to the Court of that country of about three hundred years ago. Soiled, faded, and ruined as it is, there is no difficulty in ascertaining that it was of the richest materials, and that its trimmings and its embellishments were of the very costliest description. I have no hesitation in pronouncing that such a dress could only have been intended for a lady of rank, or at least of great wealth; and furthermore my opinion is that it was made in London. I do not think that any provincial milliner could have turned out such an exquisite piece of workmanship as this must undoubtedly have been. The person for whom it was intended must have possessed a superb figure, of well developed proportions, but yet of a just and admirable symmetry."

Having obtained this information, the head-constable necessarily came to the conclusion that the dress belonged neither to the opera-dancer nor to her servant. It must therefore have been brought into that neighbourhood with the intention of being delivered into the hands of some lady for whom it was made. The constable remembered how it had been intimated at the inquest, that the unfortunate deceased Emily Archer had boasted at the peasant's cottage of her acquaintance with Lord Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton. He likewise reflected that the idea had all along existed that the two women were on their way to the castle when they met their untimely and dreadful fate. Thus, was it natural, that he should now ask himself the question, whether that masquerade dress had been intended for Lady Saxondale, or for any guest who might happen to be staying with her at the time? If it were so, the

fact might at the first glance appear to be of but the most trivial importance,—inasmuch as no matter whither the women were bound at the time, nor what their errand might be, the constable considered it to be perfectly clear that they had been intercepted by a miscreant or miscreants, who, for purposes of plunder, had assassinated them. But still he deemed it important to ascertain every possible particular in respect to the victims: he knew full well that the most insignificant facts, and those which at first may appear to be most irrelevant, are oftentimes found to enter as important links into a chain of evidence. Not, be it understood, that the head-constable fancied for a single moment there was any one at Saxondale Castle, either at the time of the tragedy or on the present occasion, who could throw the faintest light upon the authorship of the foul deed: he was merely now reflecting that it was important to arrive at the knowledge of any fresh particular concerning which such information could be procured.

We should add that the head-constable of Gainsborough had been much blamed at the time—as indeed is always the case with police-authorities in such cases—for not having discovered the murderers. It had been said that he was inefficient: and an attempt was even made to remove him from his situation. He had thus an important incentive to make him display fresh activity in respect to any new particulars which transpired.

The head-constable, having learnt from the peasant on the preceding evening that Lady Saxondale was at the castle, made up his mind to call upon her for the purpose of soliciting any information which she might be able to give on the two specific points—whether the murdered women were expected to call upon her on the night of the tragedy, and whether the dress was for herself or any guest staying with her at the time? But then it occurred to the official, that if the dress had really been for her ladyship, she could not have failed to recognise it as being such a one as she had ordered to be made, when the peasant took it to the castle and displayed it as already described. On the other hand, the constable argued that if her son Lord Saxondale had really been unduly intimate with Emily Archer, her ladyship would have naturally avoided any unnecessary allusion on the point, and might have chosen to keep to herself whatsoever she knew in respect to that dress. Then again he reflected how improbable it was that the son's mistress—if such she were—should have been employed as the bearer of a parcel for the mother. Thus, altogether, the constable grew more and more bewildered the longer he meditated on the matter: the day was passing away—and he could decide upon nothing. Finally, however, in the evening, he consulted a friend; and by his advice, adopted his original resolution of proceeding to the castle.

We must however go back to an earlier part of this same day, in order to describe an incident which occurred, and which must be necessarily interwoven in our narrative.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon—as the dusk at the wintry season of December was approaching—that Lady Saxondale was returning from a long and lonely walk which she had been taking. As the reader may suppose, her mind was in a wretchedly unsettled state: she could not bear to be in-doors—she could not endure the presence of her son and daughter-in-law, to whom she had completely succumbed: neither could she keep her own chamber altogether, as this would appear strange in the eyes of the domestics. She had therefore rambled abroad soon after mid-day: she had roamed about, pondering upon an infinite variety of circumstances, not one of which wore an agreeable aspect: she had likewise revolved a thousand new plots and plans, not one of which could she determine on as practicable or safe;—and she was now returning, at about three o'clock, to the castle, well nigh broken in spirit,—deeply, miserably, wretchedly desponding. Looking back through the vista of years she remembered, when, as the proud and envied bride of the old Lord of the Castle, she had first trodden with elastic step upon that soil as its mistress; and when, though her bridegroom was sufficiently aged to be her grandfather, she nevertheless gloried in the marriage as one that had raised her from the humble grade of a country clergyman's daughter to the lofty rank of a patrician of the land. Ah! at that time, little, little did she suspect what her future years were destined to evolve!—little, little did she foresee what poignant anxieties, what manifold chicaneries——aye, and what dark crimes, too, were to make up the component parts of her as yet untrodden career. But the present—the present! what was she to do now? Was she to abandon herself, without a single effort, to the loss of power, of influence, and of authority? was she to succumb without a struggle to Edmund whom she abhorred, and Adelaide whom she detested? was she to endure, unavenged, the young lord's insolent superciliousness and his bride's triumphant arrogance? Was she likewise to fulfil her pledge, and in a day or two depart from the castle, never to return!—was she to fly to the Continent, bury herself in some seclusion, and pass the remainder of her days in a wretched obscurity? For wretched such obscurity would indeed prove to the proud, the active, and the domineering disposition of the ambitious Lady Saxondale.

Ah! but how to avoid all this?—*that* was the question. That she could still coerce Edmund if he were *alone*, she had no doubt. She would practise with him a new game: instead of tyrannizing over him, she would flatter, cajole, and coax him—she would immerse him in pleasures—she would surround him with the luxuries which he loved—she would adopt every means to enervate and emasculate him—and thus would she acquire the fullest ascendancy over his mind, so as virtually to keep him imprisoned within the scope of her influence. All this she might do if he were *alone*: but he was not! He had continually by his side a woman as astute, as artful, as designing, and as penetrating as herself—a woman who could doubtless prove equally unscrupulous—a woman who, Lady Saxondale doubted not, was but too surely guilty of the crime of husband-murder of which she had been accused! This woman, then, it was who now stood as an impassable barrier in Lady Saxondale's pathway. But could not this barrier be removed? could not that woman be stricken down in the midst of that path where her presence was so formidable? Yes, doubtless—by a crime—and only by a crime!

No. 93.—THIRD SERIES. THE MARQUIS OF EAGLEDEAN.

Oh! but a crime——heavens! had not Lady Saxondale supped full of the horrors of crime already? Crime! crime!——was it to be ever crime? Alas, when once the road of iniquity is entered upon, crime after crime must mark the advance of those who tread it: bloodstained milestones do they become, indicating distances passed in safety, and pointing intervals of a still guiltier progress! Did her ladyship shudder, as the thought of another crime——one more crime——a crime that was to be the last and the crowning one, thus gradually arose in her imagination as she approached the castle on returning from her half-distracted ramble?—or did she begin to envisage it as the only possible alternative that was to save from utter ruin the fabric of that power which she had hitherto taken so much pains to build up? Were her warrings by day and her long agonics of toil by night—her schamings and her plottings, her manœuvres and her chicaneries, to have been passed through for naught? was all the catalogue of her crimes to become useless for the want of one more crime to crown everything with success?

It was while the thought of this new but last deed of turpitude was expanding and acquiring consistency in her mind, that Satan appeared greedily on the watch to help her onward to its consummation. There was a bridge across the river, at a spot where she halted for a few moments the better to commune with her thoughts: and as the arch had a much wider span than was requisite for the actual bed of the stream—the earth having accumulated on either bank—a portion of each of those banks was left dry beneath the bridge. We say that Lady Saxondale halted at this spot for a few moments; and while she stood there gazing upon the castle which was about a quarter of a mile distant, the countenance of a man was stealthily thrust forth from under the bridge. The eyes which thus peered out, recognised Lady Saxondale's form in a moment, though the face was unseen, her back being turned towards the individual. Then an ejaculation of satisfaction, uttered in a coarse tone, reached the ears of Lady Saxondale; and as she glanced round with a sudden start, she perceived a man emerge from the dry part of the bank beneath the bridge. She too gave vent to an ejaculation, as she at once recognised Chiffin the Cannibal.

"Well, my lady," said the fellow, "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure—though, to tell you the truth, your ladyship is just the very identical person I was wanting to see; and in a fit of desperation I meant to make my way into the castle this blessed night that is coming: for I learnt that you were staying there——"

"And what would you with me?" demanded Lady Saxondale, sweeping her rapid looks around, to assure herself that she was not observed while thus discoursing with that dreadful-looking man. "Money, doubtless? always money! For no other purpose could you seek me."

"Now pray, your ladyship," said Chiffin, with a grim smile, "don't set me down as so uncommon selfish. In the first place, it's a blessing to enjoy the acquaintance of a noble lady like you; and in the second place, how should I know but what you might have some little business in hand that I could give a help to?"

"What are your circumstances?" asked her ladyship quickly: "desperate, I presume? I thought you were going to America—that you had gone indeed——"

"Well, I told Lord Harold I should go: and I told his uncle too—that's the Marquis of Eagledean—I should go: but meaning to go and going is two very different things. Don't you see, when I make up my mind one way, Fate orders another. Lord bless you! adventures crowd upon me as thick as bees did upon the bear when he upset the hive;—and that's the long and short of it. You see, my lady, it's no easy matter for a gentleman of such a high and mighty reputation as I am, to get out of the country. The folks wont part with me: they watch the sea-ports to prevent me getting away from them."

"I suppose that you have been committing fresh deeds of horror?" said Lady Saxondale, who only thus prolonged the discourse to gain the requisite leisure for reflection upon the idea which was now uppermost in her mind.

"Well, ma'am, I have done a little more work in that way," answered Chiffin, quite coolly and unconcernedly. "There was a feller, you see, which had played me some tricks: so I took the liberty of pitching him down a well—and such a lazy vagabond he was, he wouldn't come out again. That was a matter of three or four weeks ago. The consequence was a row took place in the house; and I had to cut and run. I have been wandering and hiding, hiding and wandering, till I was nearly worn out; and then to crown it all, I fell in with a parcel of scamps at a little way-side public-house; and getting drunk, was ass enough to show what money I had about me—upon which, when I fell asleep, they robbed me of every skturick. Then thought I to myself, there is nothing left for it but to go to the castle in the hope that her ladyship may be there. I learnt from a labouring man just now that sure enough your ladyship was there; and so I came and crept under the bridge here, to lay quiet till night-time, when I meant to get to my old quarters. Now, that's the blessed truth, my lady. If you have got anything I can do for you, tell me what it is, and it shall be done: but if you have not, lend me a hundred or so—and when I am a rich man and got a large estate in North America, I will send you over a remittance."

Lady Saxondale would not have suffered the Cannibal to continue thus long in his free-and-easy, familiar discourse, were it not that she was reflecting the while in a half-abstracted manner upon that idea which, as we have already said, was acquiring a greater consistency in her mind. She looked at him: his condition fully corroborated his tale, and denoted the desperation of his circumstances. His clothes were torn in several places and soiled with mud: his hat was more than ever battered: his beard was of nearly a week's growth; and yet the fellow, though in this miserable plight, had not lost the half-dogged, half devil-me-care kind of brutal recklessness, which was wont to characterise him. His hand grasped a club:—seldom indeed was it that Chiffin the Cannibal had ever been seen without his murderous bludgeon.

As Lady Saxondale thus gazed upon the ruffian, she could not help saying to herself, "It is destined that this one last crime is to be perpetrated!

Scarcely had the idea taken birth in my mind, when Satan sent me the instrument to accomplish it. Ah! is it, then, indeed no fable that human beings may sell their souls to the Evil One? They can—they can; and the method of doing so by the formal means of a written compact, signed by one's own blood, is the only part of the proceeding which is a fiction. Ah! if I have thus sold myself to Satan, of a verity he leaves me not long in a dilemma, without sending me the means of self-extrication; and if ever he had upon earth an agent in human shape, the incarnate demon stands before me know."

Some such reflections as these swept through the mind of Lady Saxondale, as she surveyed Chiffin the Cannibal; and at length breaking silence, she said, "So your circumstances are desperate, and it would be an object to you to earn five hundred pounds?"

"Five hundred pounds!" echoed the Cannibal, whirling his bludgeon up in the air, and catching it with a full sounding grasp of his huge, muscular hand, as it fell: "five hundred pounds! Lord bless your ladyship! only a quarter of an hour back, if any body had told me there was such a sum in the world, I should really have doubted it, and fancied that I could only have dreamt of such things. But to be serious—for five hundred pounds I am the man ready to cut a dozen throats."

"Talk not thus!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, a strong shudder passing through her entire form. "Yes—there is a deed to be done, and there are five hundred pounds to be gained by the doing of it. But we must not remain here any longer now: we might be seen together—it were dangerous. Besides, after your last adventure at the castle——"

"When that gal of your's was so horribly frightened," interjected Chiffin, with a chuckling laugh. "Well, but where shall I see your ladyship again? I suppose the rooms are still shut up, as they always used to be?"

"Yes," replied Lady Saxondale; "and everything considered, it will perhaps be better for you to take up your quarters there. If seen prowling about, or observed hiding under bridges or haystacks——"

"Well, it would look rayther suspicious," observed Chiffin: "partickler as I'm not exactly in a Court-dress. Depend upon it, my lady, it's the best plan; and then perhaps you might come and hold a confab with me at the usual hour, and give me full instructions. But pray don't forget the blunt at the same time; and if your ladyship *could* manage to put a flask of brandy in your pocket—or rum, or gin—I'm not very partickler—it would be as well: for that chapel in the winter-time must be as cold as ice."

"Well then," observed Lady Saxondale, after having again reflected for a few moments, "get presently into your old quarters; and I will seek you there punctually at midnight."

Having thus spoken, she continued her way towards the castle; while Chiffin crept under the bridge again—there to rest concealed for another hour or so, until it should be sufficiently dark to enable him to effect his entry into the shut-up apartments.

"Yes—one more crime," said Lady Saxondale to herself, as she approached the gate of the castellated mansion: "one more crime—and then may I hope for security and triumph!"

CHAPTER CLVI.

THE HEAD-CONSTABLE.

It was about half-past eight o'clock in the evening, that the head-constable of Gainsborough alighted from a gig at the gate of Saxondale Castle, and proffered a request to the porter answering his summons, that he might be allowed to speak a few words with the Dowager Lady Saxondale,—adding that if it were in any way inconvenient to her ladyship, he would call again on the morrow; and that in any case he should not detain her many minutes.

Lady Saxondale had shortly after dinner retired to the library, under the pretence of writing letters—but in reality to separate herself from the company of Edmund and Adelaide: for, as the reader may suppose, they did not feel themselves very comfortable in each other's presence—while anything in the shape of pleasant and agreeable conversation, was altogether out of the question. The young lord and his wife were by no means sorry to be thus rid of the restraint and awkwardness created by her ladyship's society; and they cared but little what she did or whither she went—for they now felt assured that she was utterly disarmed and completely in their power.

Lady Saxondale, we said, was in the library, when a footman entered and delivered in precise terms the message which the head-constable of Gainsborough had sent in. At the first mention of his name, Lady Saxondale was stricken with a cold terror—a glacial chill which went quivering through her even unto her very heart's core: but nevertheless, at the distance which the footman was standing from her in the spacious library, he did not perceive that she was thus swayed by any unusual emotion. As he went on speaking, Lady Saxondale's presence of mind came back partially: for she thought to herself that the message was too civil, and that proposal of returning again on the morrow if more convenient, was too unlike a hostile proceeding, for the head-constable to have any such intention. She therefore at once bade the footman introduce the official; and during the few minutes that elapsed ere the door again opened, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "It is doubtless relative to this discovery of yesterday: but how can that dress be in any way associated with me? What clue can have been obtained. Edmund and Adelaide can have done nothing: no—I am sure not! And then too, the courtesy which marks the man's approach——No, I have nothing to fear!"

Nevertheless, as Lady Saxondale possessed a guilty conscience, she was far from being entirely free from misgivings as the constable entered the room; and her large dark eyes bent upon him the penetrating look of eagles' glances, as he bowed obsequiously in her presence. Her courage rose: for she saw that the man was himself somewhat awkward and embarrassed—and the thought flashed to her that it was probably altogether upon quite a different business he had come.

"I hope," he said, "that your ladyship will pardon this intrusion—perhaps a most unwarrantable one: but in consequence of something that has transpired, I feel it my duty to solicit a little information at your ladyship's hands."

"Upon what subject?" she inquired, with such an outward display of calmness that not for a single moment could he fancy her to be inwardly ruffled.

"It is relative to that unfortunate occurrence—that dreadful deed—which was perpetrated so mysteriously a few months back; and as there is not as yet the slightest clue——"

These last words were productive of an infinite relief to Lady Saxondale; and resuming her own seat, she motioned the constable to take a chair.

"I suppose you allude to the assassination of the two women on the bank of the river?" she observed.

"It is so, my lady. That dress which your ladyship saw yesterday, has been placed in my hands. I am afraid that the subject may be a delicate one——"

"In what respect?" asked Lady Saxondale, somewhat hastily.

"My lady, rumour did at the time whisper that Lord Saxondale was somewhat intimately acquainted with Miss Archer; and therefore it is natural to understand how your ladyship may dislike having the topic brought to your attention."

"But if it be necessary for the purposes of justice," was the response, given with a perfect maintenance of outward composure, "you must not hesitate to speak, nor I to answer. You say that no clue has been obtained to the discovery——"

"Not the slightest, my lady; and that is the reason I am anxious to glean as many particulars as I can, no matter how trivial they may be. If therefore I could learn for what purpose those unfortunate women came into Lincolnshire at all: and also——"

"I will tell you candidly," interrupted Lady Saxondale, assuming the merit of a frankness which she felt convinced she might display with all possible safety. "Yes—it is true that the unfortunate Miss Archer was my son's mistress. There was a desperate quarrel between them in London: she felt aggrieved—she considered that she had claims upon him—she addressed herself to me. Indeed, I saw her within these walls the very day before that on which she and her servant lost their lives. I could not then make up my mind what to do in the matter. I had guests staying in the castle—Lady Macdonald, Lady Florina Staunton, her brother Lord Harold—while Mr. Hawkshaw and other neighbours were constant visitors. I was fearful that a character so well known by sight as a somewhat conspicuous dancer at the Opera, might be recognised by my guests or my visitors. Moreover, my son at the time was engaged to be married to Lady Florina Staunton; and it would have been shocking for that amiable and excellent girl to discover by any means that his lordship's cast-off mistress—for this in plain terms she was—was applying to me for pecuniary redress."

"Naturally enough, my lady," observed the head-constable, gratified and proud at the mingled courtesy and frankness with which he felt himself to be treated.

"You can appreciate, therefore, my motives," continued her ladyship, "when I begged Miss Archer to give me time to think over the matter, and not to seek my presence again save and except under circumstances of the strictest secrecy. In justice to myself—though reluctant indeed to say a word against the dead—I must observe that Miss Archer was very violent. Availing herself of her knowledge of my son's engagement with Lady Florina, she threatened an exposure; and she herself, in a very peremptory manner, made an appointment to call upon me again at the castle between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of the ensuing day, to know my decision. I confess that I was angry; and I declared that if she came in a public manner—as, for instance, in any vehicle to excite attention—I would not see her. She became more humble; and of her own accord volunteered her readiness to come on foot, of course being accompanied by her maid. To this I had no objection: but little did I foresee what a terrific peril the two fated women were destined to encounter, and how dread was to be the catastrophe."

"I thank your ladyship for these explanations," said the constable, making a low bow.

"Of course," continued her ladyship, "when the inquest was held, I saw no necessity for going forward, or sending to communicate all these facts. Consider, sir, a mother's feelings——"

"I can understand them fully," exclaimed the constable; "and it was most natural that your ladyship should study to save your son from what might have been a little exposure—and at all events would have had the effect of breaking off a marriage which your ladyship at the time was anxious he should contract. And now, my lady, I have but one more word to say——"

"I can anticipate what it is," exclaimed Lady Saxondale. "You would ask me relative to the dress?—and with the same frankness I have hitherto shown, will I reply. The dress was mine; but therewith was connected a certain infamous piece of scandal regarding me. You will not ask me to repeat it: suffice it to say, it was false:—but Miss Archer had been led to believe it was true. By certain means—no matter what—she obtained possession of that dress; and she purposed to use it as a means of extortion in respect to my purse. When she called upon me, I reproached her bitterly for having adopted such vile, base means; and assured her that when she again sought my presence, if she restored me not that very costly costume which had been stolen from me——yes, *stolen* from me——I would not listen to another word she might have to say. And now, my dear sir, with your good sense, and with your delicate appreciation of circumstances, you can understand how it was that I did not choose to recognise that dress, even when inspecting it closely, on its being displayed by the labouring man yesterday."

"To be sure not!" exclaimed the constable: "your ladyship was not to place yourself in the position of giving explanations to a peasant, and before all the members of your household."

The official was indeed completely satisfied of the truth of every word which Lady Saxondale had spoken; for such was the seeming frankness of her manner and the candid openness of her

look, that it was impossible to doubt her sincerity.

"And now," she asked, "are there any other particulars which I can give you?"

"None, my lady," responded the constable, after a few moments' reflection.

"Of course," she went on to say, "you will keep to yourself all that I have been telling you: for my daughter-in-law is dotingly attached to Lord Saxondale—and I do not mind confessing to you, she is exceedingly jealous. Therefore, if she heard that my son had ever been engaged in such a *liaison* with an opera-dancer, she would be very unhappy; and inasmuch as these circumstances cannot really have the slightest connexion with any clue to the discovery of the assassins of those unfortunate women, it would be a mere wanton infliction of pain upon certain members of my family—indeed, upon us all—if the particulars were flung abroad to be caught up by the greedy tongue of scandal."

"Your ladyship may depend upon my discretion," responded the constable, as he rose to take his departure.

At this moment strange sounds reached the ears of Lady Saxondale and the constable—ejaculations loud and vehement—hurried and excited cries, as if the castle were on fire, or as if an attack were being made by banditti and the household were being summoned to resistance. Her ladyship started up with some suspicion of a new calamity: the constable listened with all his ears, as if thinking that such a disturbance must more or less regard his own official functions.

Suddenly the door of the library burst open; and Lucilla, rushing in, exclaimed, "Oh, my lady! thieves — robbers — burglars — murderers — in the tapestry-rooms!"

Lady Saxondale's vague suspicion was thus confirmed in a moment; and she grew pale as death. That she should do so, appeared by no means unnatural either to Lucilla or the constable,—considering the announcement which was thus abruptly made: but little did they comprehend the real reason which she had for being so affrighted.

"Thieves?" ejaculated the officer: and he sprang to the door.

Lady Saxondale, quickly recovering her self-possession, — or rather startled into it by the sudden consciousness of some new and frightful danger — sprang after the constable. They hurried up the staircase. On the landing and in one of the diverging corridors, some of the servants were speeding along: Edmund and Adelaide, previously alarmed by the cries, had issued forth from the drawing-room.

"What is it? what is it?" they demanded, as if speaking in one breath, and in a very excited manner: though perhaps the young nobleman was far more alarmed than his wife.

"Thieves!" cried Lucilla, who had followed Lady Saxondale and the constable.

"In the tapestry-rooms, my lord! — in the tapestry-rooms, my lady!" ejaculated one of the footmen. "The steward, the butler, and several others have shouted for assistance from the passage-windows on the western side!"

Edmund rushed back into the drawing-room—snatched up a poker—and coming forth again, followed the rest towards the tapestry-rooms, taking good care however to be as much in the rear as possible: for, as the reader is already aware, he was very far from being the bravest person in existence. As for Adelaide—she, much more courageous, had fallen into the stream,—keeping pace with the constable and her mother-in-law.

From this hurried description, an idea may be formed of the confusion and excitement which prevailed; and when we add that several of the servants carried lights in their hands, which flamed and oscillated as they were borne rapidly along, it may be well conceived that the spectacle was altogether calculated to sustain that sensation of wild interest and alarm. The constable, rushing onward, soon outstripped most of the domestics: Lady Saxondale kept close behind him: and Adelaide was not far distant. In this manner the corridors and passages were soon threaded; and as they entered the western side of the castle, the sounds of loud voices, speaking in an excited manner, and emanating from the chapel, guided them all thither.

On entering that place, the spectacle which burst on the view of Lady Saxondale, was Chiffin the Cannibal struggling desperately with the steward, the butler, and two of the footmen. These four, however, had got too strong a hold upon him, and were maintaining their grasp too tenaciously, either to allow the ruffian to escape, or to do them much harm. His heavy boots certainly inflicted a few severe kicks upon their shins: but his arms were held fast—and when he endeavoured to butt at them, and even to bite, with all the ferocity of a savage beast, they were perfectly strong enough as well as sufficiently brave and resolute to retain him in their clutch. The head-constable, now darting forward, put an end to the fellow's desperate struggles, by seizing his legs and thus causing him to fall heavily on the pavement of the chapel—a proceeding which well nigh brought down with equal force those who held him.

No sooner was Chiffin the Cannibal thus prostrate, when handkerchiefs were promptly put in requisition to bind his limbs; and the ruffian was now overcome and powerless. As he lay flat on his back, he cast his grim savage looks around: his eyes encountered those of Lady Saxondale; and not quicker is the lightning-flash athwart the sky, than was the glance which she flung upon him, significantly bidding him to remain quiet and hold his peace. There was promise in that look; and the thought darted into Chiffin's mind, that it would be much better for him to keep silent, and not proclaim to those present his acquaintance with her ladyship,—as by so doing, he would only convert her into an enemy, whereas she might possibly serve him as a friend.

"Now, make the fellow sit up," exclaimed the constable, "while we determine how he is to be disposed of: for I presume he was found as an intruder here, and is but little likely to give a good account of himself."

The domestics lifted the Cannibal up, and placed him on a stone bench against one of the walls. At this instant Lord Saxondale entered the chapel; and the moment his eyes lighted upon the Cannibal, an ejaculation of astonishment escaped his lips: for he at once recognised the man who had delivered him from imprisonment at Dr. Ferney's

house. The looks of all present instantaneously settled upon the young nobleman,—his mother being as much astonished as the rest: for she knew not that Chiffin was the author of his release—neither was she aware that her son and that ruffian could have ever met before.

"Now then," growled the Cannibal, as an idea suddenly struck him, "you will perhaps let me go, when his lordship tells you that I have done him a service in my time; and it was natural enow that I should come here to ask for a recompense."

"Ah, that voice!" cried Lucilla, who at the moment entered the chapel,—she having kept completely in the rear of the living stream. "That voice! Yes—it is the same!"

The domestics at once understood what Lucilla meant; and the head-constable glanced towards her ladyship for instructions, or at least for some suggestion what course was now to be adopted, inasmuch as her son did not deny Chiffin's assertion that he lay under an obligation to him.

"You hold your tongue, young o'oman," said the Cannibal, addressing himself to Lucilla. "You never saw or heard me before, I know! And his lordship will very soon tell you all that I am a highly respectable genelman, although somewhat under a cloud at present."

"Yes—it is perfectly true," exclaimed Edmund, "that this man did me a great service:"—then thinking that it would seem very odd if he did not specifically mention what it was, he added, "When I was shut up in a certain place the other day, he helped me out of it."

"All this appears so very extraordinary," observed the head-constable of Gainsborough, "that it must be calmly and deliberately looked into. In the first place, I should like to know under what circumstances the man was discovered within these walls?"

"I will explain," said the steward. "In consequence of something which took place a few weeks back, I have considered it to be my duty to visit the shut-up apartments on this side of the building every evening; and as there are a great many rooms to inspect—and moreover, as one does not exactly like to come here alone—I have usually been accompanied by three or four of the other domestics. Well, on coming into the chapel just now, I thought I heard the sounds of footsteps retreating into the cloister. I cried out for my comrades to hasten hither. They came: and we discovered this fellow crouching behind one of the monuments. Three of us tried to drag him out, while another hastened to the passage-window—threw it open—and shouted for assistance: for we did not know but what there might be more of them concealed in the place. The fellow struggled desperately, as you may have seen——"

"But tell me," said the constable, "to what circumstances you allude as having induced you to visit these rooms?—and what did the young woman mean by her ejaculation which seemed to imply that she recognised this individual's voice?"

"One word, sir," exclaimed Lady Saxondale, now thinking it high time to interfere. "It appears that his lordship, my son, has received a service at this person's hands; and as he himself has observed, it was natural he should come to ask for a reward. Perhaps he did not like to present himself in the usual manner at the castle-gate, and therefore obtained stealthy entrance in the hope of finding an opportunity to speak to his lordship."

"Yes—that's exactly what it is," growled Chiffin. "I was afraid that if I rang at the bell, some of these powdered flunkies would order me off, just because I don't happen to have my Sunday clothes on: and so I thought——"

"You had better hold your tongue," said the constable sternly. "I can assure you that although her ladyship, in the goodness of her heart may be inclined to put the most favourable construction on your proceeding, I am not to be equally misled. Young woman," he added, turning to Lucilla, "how is it that this man's voice was at once familiar to you?"

"Lucilla, do you hear the constable speak to you?" cried Lady Saxondale: but she only thus addressed the maid, in order to have an opportunity and an excuse for accosting her; and hastening up to the spot where she was standing, she added in a hurried whisper, "Not a word of the real truth! Say it was a mistake!"

"Now, young woman," exclaimed the constable, "don't you hear that your mistress orders you to speak out? You need not be afraid: this man can do you no harm now."

"I think I can tell the story for her," observed the steward, naturally fancying that Lucilla was cowed and over-awed by the terror of the Cannibal's presence. "The fact is, sir," he went on to say, addressing the head-constable, "there was a sort of burglarious entrance effected here a few weeks back: the maid there was alarmed by the entrance of persons into the room where she slept; and now, as you perceive, she has recognised the voice of one of them."

The steward did not at the time remember the injunction which he himself, as well as all the other servants had received, from Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw not to give publicity to the incident which he had been explaining. In the excitement of the present circumstance he utterly lost sight of that injunction.

"This grows very serious," observed the head-constable: and now he surveyed Chiffin more attentively than he had previously done. "Either I have seen you before," he went on to say, in a sort of musing tone; "or else I have read a very accurate description of you——"

"No, not of me, sir," responded the Cannibal: "it's quite a mistake. I am an honest hard-working man."

"What is your name? where do you live? and can you get anybody to speak to your character?" demanded the constable.

"My name is Brown, sir. I live in London when I'm at home—— Ask his lordship there whether I ain't a very respectable man?"

"Faith! I know nothing at all about you," ejaculated Saxondale, with a supercilious hauteur. "All I know is that you delivered me out of a certain place; and if I had met you, and you had asked for a reward, I should certainly have given it."

Meanwhile the head-constable had been scrutinizing Chiffin with still more minuteness, until his original suspicion was confirmed—that in some way

or another the fellow, both by his features and his dress, was not altogether unfamiliar to him. Recollecting that he had a bundle of certain papers in his possession, he drew them forth: and stepping somewhat aside, began turning them over one after the other, by the aid of a candle which he beckoned to one of the footmen to hold close for the purpose.

"Come, my lord," said Chiffin, now getting very uneasy, "do speak a good word in my favour. Don't be ungrateful on account of what I did for your lordship."

But at this moment an ejaculation burst from the lips of the head-constable—an ejaculation of mingled horror and astonishment: and then, as suddenly resuming his wonted official composure, he said, "There is not the slightest necessity for carrying this investigation any farther. The man is my prisoner on a far more serious charge than any which might at first be brought against him. His name is Chiffin—and he is a murderer!"

Cries of horror burst from the lips of many present. The Cannibal, perceiving that he was recognised from a printed description which the head-constable had in his possession, said not another word—but reflected gloomily within himself upon the chances of Lady Saxondale endeavouring to do anything to save him.

"It now remains for consideration," the constable went on to say, "how we can best dispose of the fellow until the morning: for I should not like the risk of taking him away while it is dark—he would endeavour to escape."

"Her ladyship," observed the steward, "will permit me and some of the others to help you convey him over to Gainsborough."

"No—let the constable have his own way," Lady Saxondale hastened to observe. "He knows best; and he is responsible for the safe custody of his prisoner."

The official reflected for a few moments. He thought to himself that as Chiffin was such a desperate character, it might be perilous to venture his removal in the care of the servants of her ladyship's household; and that it would be much better to wait until daylight, and then convey him in the charge of his own police-officers before the nearest magistrate for identification, so that with proper authority he might be removed up to London. Besides, the head-constable had an eye to the reward for Chiffin's apprehension; and it would not at all answer his purpose to afford the fellow the slightest opportunity to escape under the cover of darkness. He looked around; and he thought to himself that the chapel where this scene took place, would serve as a secure prison until the morning. But in order to make sure, he took a light in his hand, and was about to investigate the chapel more narrowly,—when Lady Saxondale, as if divining his intention, said, "You are perfectly welcome to leave him here if you choose. The door has strong bolts and bars: the windows of the chapel and the cloister have iron gratings; and there is no possible means of egress."

"Besides," added the constable, "I will myself keep watch upon him throughout the night; and I shall take the liberty of asking one of your ladyship's servants to go over to Gainsborough early in the morning, and bring half-a-dozen of my men, so that we will take good care to keep him secure. I thank your ladyship for your offer, which I therefore accept."

Lady Saxondale darted, unperceived by any one else, a quick glance of intelligence upon the Cannibal, who fully comprehended that she had some friendly purpose in view in thus interfering to procure his stay there. He wore an appearance of gloomy and savage sullenness: but yet hope was in the ruffian's breast—for he knew that her ladyship was too astute and clever to be easily baffled in any project on which she had set her mind, and that she would devise some plan of outwitting the vigilance of the chief constable. This official now requested those present to withdraw,—he himself issuing forth from the chapel last of all. As her ladyship had observed, the door had massive bars and bolts; and these were all secured. There was moreover a key fastening a padlock. This key the head-constable secured about his own person. He then inquired if there were any pistols in the castle? The steward at once volunteered the loan of a pair which he had recently purchased; and these were placed in the constable's possession. A sofa was brought out into the passage from one of the tapestry-rooms, and was stationed against the chapel-door. A lamp was placed in a window-recess; and Lady Saxondale gave instructions that food and wine should be supplied for the constable's use.

These arrangements being completed, and it being now late, her ladyship directed the domestics to seek their respective chambers—at the same time observing that none of them need labour under any apprehension of being disturbed in the night, as it was evident the prisoner was too well guarded to have the slightest chance of effecting his escape. It was however some time before the servants separated,—the incidents of the evening, and the presence of a murderer beneath those walls, being sufficient to excite them, and afford ample scope for their garrulous comments. Lucilla was particularly questioned as to whether she was certain that Chiffin's voice was the same she had heard on the memorable night when her repose was intruded upon?—and as she confidently persisted in an affirmative response, the wonder of the domestics was more than ever excited at the circumstance that Lord Harold Staunton could have connected himself with such a dreadful character. But that Lady Saxondale had any previous knowledge of Chiffin, was not for a moment suspected. Throughout the scene in the chapel, she had maintained an admirable show of external composure; and the significant glances she had flung upon Chiffin, had passed entirely unperceived by all save him to whom they were directed.

On quitting the chapel, her ladyship did not join Edmund and Adelaide in the drawing-room: she did not choose to converse with them on this new incident which had occurred; but at once sought her own chamber, and having dispensed with Lucilla's attendance, sat down to reflect upon the best course which was now to be adopted.

The reader will full well understand that Lady Saxondale had purposed to employ the Cannibal as an agent for ridding her of the *one* great obstacle that was now in her pathway: namely, Adelaide. That she could still succeed in making Chiffin's services thus horribly and terribly available, she

did not imagine: but having once brought herself to look the idea of this new crime fixedly in the face, she resolved that it should be perpetrated by some means or another. Therefore she did not renounce her intention of making one more desperate effort to consolidate her own power, and pursue the career from which for a moment the incident of the masquerading-dress had threatened to divert her altogether. If she had suddenly purposed to fly from England, now that Chiffin was taken captive, she would have abandoned him to his fate, desperately reckless of whatsoever he might choose to say of her: but as she had made up her mind to remain, and prosecute her schemes to the end, it was absolutely necessary to bear a friendly part towards that man, and aid him to escape, so that he should not be led into any disagreeable revelations with regard to antecedent circumstances.

Lady Saxondale therefore decided that Chiffin the Cannibal should be enabled to effect his escape: but how was this to be done? The windows of the chapel and the cloister were all protected by massive iron bars, as her ladyship had intimated when directing the constable's attention to the fact; and the constable himself was keeping watch outside the chapel-door, which was barred, bolted, and locked. Nevertheless, Lady Saxondale could afford to smile at these circumstances,—inasmuch as there was a secret connected with the cloister known to no living soul except herself. Many long years back her husband had communicated it to her; and as it was a sort of hereditary mystery preserved in the family, she had never revealed it to other ears.

She sat in her chamber till midnight: and then, having ascertained by listening that the castle was all quiet, and that the servants had at length separated to their respective chambers, she prepared for the enterprise which she had in hand. First she took from her writing-desk a sum of money, amounting to a couple of hundred pounds in notes and gold: and this she wrapped up in a small parcel. Then, with the lamp in her hand, she descended to the library; and opening a small cupboard underneath one of the bookcases, she took from that recess a moderate-sized key. This, through long disuse, had become encrusted with rust: Lady Saxondale accordingly returned to her own chamber, and provided herself with a small bottle of hair-oil from her toilet-table. She likewise took some lucifer matches and a pen-knife; and again descended the stairs. On reaching the great entrance-hall, she extinguished the lamp; but still carrying it in her hand, passed out into the quadrangular court on which the buildings looked. The night was dark as pitch: there was consequently no danger of her being observed by any one who might not as yet have retired to rest. But as she glanced up at the windows on every side, she saw that one light was alone burning; and this was at the casement of the passage where the head-constable of Gainsborough was keeping watch.

Lady Saxondale crossed the quadrangle, and stopped at a small low door in the north-western angle. She tried the key: but, as she had anticipated, it was too rusty to turn in the lock. She oiled it; and another essay proved successful—the door opened—and she crossed the threshold. When inside, she closed the door; and then, by the aid of the lucifer-matches with which she was provided, re-lighted her lamp. She found herself at the entrance of a narrow stone passage, which led forward into utter darkness, and where the chill struck like myriads of ice-shafts penetrating through her brain and to her very heart's core. She shuddered—her teeth chattered—and she was seized with a racking pain in the head through the intensity of the cold: it seemed as if ice had been suddenly applied to her temples. But the air was pure—or at least free from mephitic vapours; and thus was it evident that the premises which she was entering, had apertures for the currents of the atmosphere to pass through.

She proceeded along the narrow stone passage, —advancing cautiously lest any of the masonry should have fallen in, and thus create a stumbling block in her way. But such was not the case: the mass of stonework forming the walls on either side, and the arching ceiling, was as solid and compact as if this corridor had been hollowed out of a granite rock itself: for the old castle appeared not to belong to time, but unto eternity. The passage was about twenty yards in length; and it terminated with a spiral ascent of steps, all of the hardest stone. Up these did Lady Saxondale mount; and in a few minutes she entered a long narrow apartment—or rather an enclosure of solid masonry—in which were the stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of those long-dead ancestors of the Saxondale family whose monuments were in the cloister above. For this vault—if such it could be termed, which was not underground—was precisely beneath the cloister itself, and exactly corresponding with it in dimensions. Several loop-holes on the western side—namely, the one overlooking the river—admitted the currents of fresh air. Awful was the silence and deadly the chill which prevailed in this place,—a silence fitted for the place of tombs—a chill such as that which sweeps from the sounding sea-lashed shores of Labrador. Lady Saxondale shuddered again—but it was more with the cold than with fear: for this woman of the most powerful mind, feared her crimes far more on account of what the living might do to her as the consequences thereof, than for any superstitious terrors which their memory might conjure up.

The stone *mausolea* enclosing the coffins of the long-dead ancestors of the house of Saxondale, stood in due order along the walls: and in the middle of the place was an ascent of stone steps reaching up to the ceiling—a height of about seven feet. In that stone ceiling, or roof, they appeared to terminate. Lady Saxondale ascended a few of these steps, until her head nearly touched the masonry above: and then, with the lamp, she carefully examined the stonework which was thus overhead. An iron knob set in a slight hollow of one of the stones, soon arrested her gaze: and against this knob did she press her hand firmly. It yielded somewhat to her touch: the stonework began slowly to move overhead—until at length an aperture was formed large enough for her to pass through. She ascended; and in a few moments stood in the cloister leading out of the chapel. The huge colossal figure of the armed warrior had turned almost completely round: for it moved upon a vertical pivot, and the base of its

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pedestal had thus been contrived to form that secret means of communication between the cloister and the place of tombs.

Lady Saxondale passed on towards the chapel—but slowly and cautiously; for she was fearful lest the Cannibal, on perceiving a light approaching, might in an access of superstitious alarm give vent to an ejaculation that would reach the ear of the constable keeping watch on the other side of the chapel door. But the man whom she came thus to succour, was as little prone to superstitious fears as herself; and moreover, he had all along been expecting some assistance on the part of her ladyship—though he had been bewildering himself in conjectures how it could be possibly afforded, or from what quarter it would come. Nevertheless, being to a certain extent prepared, Chiffin no sooner caught a glimpse of the first glimmering rays which the lamp threw into the chapel, as Lady Saxondale approached from the cloister—than he knew full well who was nigh at hand.

We should observe that the villain had been so firmly and effectually bound with the handkerchiefs which had been fastened on his arms and legs, that all his endeavours to rid himself of those bonds had proved ineffectual; and he had therefore remained on the stone bench where the constable and the domestics had deposited him. As Lady Saxondale emerged from the cloister and came into his presence, his features expanded into a look of grim satisfaction: and really, if Chiffin were ever capable of a grateful sentiment, he experienced it now towards one who did not desert him in the hour of his most bitter need. She placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence; and then with the knife which she had brought, proceeded to cut the handkerchiefs which so firmly bound him. In a few moments he was thus far free.

Motioning him to gather up the severed kerchiefs and take them with him,—so that his disappearance from the chapel might in the morning seem all the more mysterious, and be all the more incomprehensible,—she led the way back towards the statue; and the Cannibal stared in astonishment on perceiving that this colossal figure had turned almost completely round, and in thus moving away from the spot it was wont to occupy, had disclosed a small square aperture. Lady Saxondale descended first: and on reaching the bottom of the steps in the place of tombs, held the lamp in such a manner as to aid the Cannibal in following her. She then ascended a few of the steps again; and by once more pressing the knob, made the image turn round into its proper place — the pedestal again hermetically sealing the secret aperture.

"Follow me," she said to the Cannibal: and these were the first words that were spoken from the instant she had appeared in his presence on this occasion.

"I am uncommon obliged to your ladyship for thus thinking of an old pal," responded Chiffin, whose heart was exultant: for he already felt as if he breathed the fresh air of freedom. "But about that there little business you was coming to speak to me of——"

"Enough! it cannot be done now," interrupted Lady Saxondale in a peremptory manner—and not without a feeling of intense disgust at the familiarity with which the coarse ruffian addressed her. "You have not a moment to lose: you must make the best of your way hence. Without halting must you speed so long as the darkness favours you: for there will be a loud hue and cry, and doubtless a fierce pursuit in the morning."

"All right, my lady," responded Chiffin: "depend upon it I will show 'em a clean pair of heels. There isn't no manner of mistake about that."

"Ah! one word, by the bye!" ejaculated Lady Saxondale, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "It appears, then, that you were the person who liberated my son, Lord Saxondale, from Dr. Ferney's house?"

"Yes, ma'am—I had that honour: and uncommon neat it was done, too, I can tell you. I suppose he was locked up unbeknown to you?"

"Silence—and speak not save in answer to my questions," interrupted Lady Saxondale imperiously. "Now, tell me, by whom were you engaged to accomplish this achievement?"

"Two gentlemen, one of whom was a foreigner, —a mounseer, I should say by the cut of him."

"Ah! and his name?" cried Lady Saxondale.

"I don't know it. His friend's name was Lawson; and lives in Clifford Street, Bond Street."

"But this Frenchman—was he a young and handsome man?" inquired Lady Saxondale.

"Yes—a matter of five or six-and-twenty, I should say: tall—slender—but uncommon well made. He wore a black moustachio. I hadn't an idea that a Frenchman could be such a tidy looking feller."

"It is the same: there can be no doubt of it—the Count de St. Gerard!" thought Lady Saxondale to herself: then speaking aloud, she added, "And these two gentlemen, you say, employed you to liberate my son? Tell me the circumstances."

Chiffin accordingly explained how he encountered the two gentlemen at the *Three Cadgers*—how they engaged him to proceed to the neighbourhood of Dr. Burdett's to *reconnoitre*—how he discovered that Lord Saxondale had been removed to Dr. Ferney's—and how it was arranged that he should accomplish the young nobleman's liberation. Chiffin went on to explain by what means he had effected the purpose—how a post-chaise was in readiness in Hanover Square—how Mr. Lawson and the French gentleman, both muffled in cloaks, were on the spot—and how Lawson exchanged a few words with Lord Saxondale."

"And the Frenchman," exclaimed Lady Saxondale,—"did he speak to my son?"

"No—not a word," responded Chiffin. "I remember he kept himself altogether apart, standing on one side and merely looking on."

"Recollect, if you can, what Mr. Lawson said to my son."

"He merely told him that he didn't want no thanks; and it wasn't necessary to give any explanations. Ah! I remember—Mr. Lawson also told his lordship that he was to get off into Lincolnshire as quick as possible, to join his wife there, and she would give him all explanations. Yes—and something else too," continued the Cannibal, as the circumstances came back by degrees to his memory; "Mr. Lawson said that you was in London—that your son's wife had had a con-

versation with you—and that it was absolutely necessary for him to reach Saxondale Castle as quick as possible. And this was all that took place on the occasion."

"Enough!" muttered Lady Saxondale: and then after a few moments' reflection she added aloud, "Come—we must move onward. Follow me."

She again led the way, holding the lamp in her hand. Down the spiral staircase they went: the stone passage was threaded—and the little low door gave them egress into the quadrangle. But we should observe that ere this door was again opened, her ladyship extinguished the lamp. The threshold being crossed, she re-locked the door; and with her handkerchief carefully wiped over the spot were the key-hole was set, so that in case any of the oil should have oozed forth, the traces thereof might be effectually made to disappear.

And now she guided the Cannibal across the court-yard; and they entered the castle. Again was the lamp lighted:—for a few moments they halted in the entrance-hall; and there Lady Saxondale placed the money-parcel in the Cannibal's hand, intimating how much it contained.

"For heaven's sake," she continued, in a low whisper, "get out of the country as quick as you can. Remember, if you be recaptured, I can do nothing more for you. And should it happen that you are thus unfortunate—should you, in a word, be retaken—let me hope that whatever may ensue, you will have a sufficient sense of becoming gratitude to maintain the strictest silence as to all that has at any time passed between you and me."

"Don't be alarmed, my lady," replied Chiffin, as he eagerly clutched the money thus given to him. "If I do come to dance upon nothing at Tuck-up Fair, I will be mum as a mouse about your ladyship."

Lady Saxondale made no observation in reply to this assurance, which was given in terms so horribly ludicrous and revoltingly jocular: but she proceeded at once to afford the man egress from the castle. He disappeared from her view in the darkness of the night: and she now breathed freely as she retraced her way to her own apartment.

At an early hour in the morning—long before it was light—a groom, mounted on horseback, set off for Gainsborough; and by about nine o'clock he returned, accompanied by a post-chaise containing four constables. They came well armed and provided with hand-cuffs: for the groom had failed not to tell them what a desperate character was to be dealt with.

The head-constable had remained all night at his post in the passage where the sofa was placed against the chapel-door. He had not slept a wink; and if every now and then he felt a sensation of drowsiness coming over him, he had risen to pace to and fro and shake it off. He had scarcely touched the wine which was furnished him; and he had chiefly employed the long weary hours in thinking of the manner in which he might best lay out the reward he was to obtain for handing over the formidable and ferocious murderer to the authorities in London. He did not choose to run the slightest risk of losing him by opening the chapel-door until the arrival of his subordinates from Gainsborough. When they came, they were at once conducted to the passage where their principal awaited them; and three or four of the men-servants of the household accompanied them, not merely from motives of curiosity to have another glimpse of the terrible miscreant, but likewise as an additional guarantee against any possible demonstration of violence on his part.

The sofa was drawn away—the door was opened—the head-constable, with loaded pistols in his hands, advanced into the chapel: but Chiffin was not on the seat where he had been deposited. This circumstance excited no suspicion: bound though he were, he might have managed to drag himself away to some other spot. Into the cloister did the head-constable and his followers accordingly pass: but no Chiffin was to be seen. They looked behind the monuments: the prisoner was not there. Consternation and dismay appeared upon the countenances of the head-constable and his subordinates: but one of the footmen suggested that there could be no doubt the object of their search would be found in the vestiary. The door was thrown open: but still no Chiffin. That he could have descended into the vaults, was not possible,—inasmuch as the huge bolt of the door leading thither from the vestiary, was firm in its socket. Every nook and corner was searched: but still no Chiffin! The constables and the footmen surveyed each other in downright dismay, mingled with bewilderment. How could he have escaped? Not even the handkerchiefs with which he had been bound, were to be seen. The windows were examined: not a pane of glass was broken—not an iron bar was wrenched out.

Well indeed might those present at this fruitless search, be confounded! That a man whose limbs were so firmly fastened, should have thus disappeared without leaving behind the slightest trace of the mode and manner of his flight, seemed to be invested with a preternatural mystery. Had he evaporated into thin air? or had Satan come to claim his due, thereby anticipating the hangman's work? Not for a moment was it suspected that the head-constable had connived at his escape: for his subordinates knew him too well to entertain such an idea;—and moreover, they, as well as the footmen, at once perceived that if he had done so he would have been literally flinging away the reward offered for the fellow's apprehension; as it could not be for an instant supposed that Chiffin had, concealed about his person, a larger sum than the amount thus offered, so as to have been enabled to tempt the head-constable with such a superior bribe.

The mystery was indeed, as Lady Saxondale had foreseen, perfectly beyond the most extravagant and the wildest of conjecture. The news spread through the castle; and the utmost excitement prevailed. Her ladyship, as a matter of course, affected the supremest astonishment; and she accompanied the constables in a fresh search throughout the chapel and the cloister. But all was in vain, as she very well knew it would be; and the discomfited myrmidons of justice took their way back to Gainsborough, not without the idea that the Evil One must indeed have had a hand in so mysterious a business.

CHAPTER CLVII.

THE LAST PLOT.

Two days after the incidents which we have just related, Lady Saxondale said to Edmund and Adelaide after breakfast, "To-morrow morning I purpose to leave you. The warfare is at an end between us. That we can part with very friendly feelings, is not to be supposed: but at least let us separate in peace, and with a resolve to think on either side as little of the unpleasant past as possible."

"Well, mother," answered Edmund, "I don't want to vex or annoy you, although there are many things which might induce me to do so."

"No," observed Adelaide; "we will not have more angry words:"—but she could not repress a look of exultation at the thought that she was now completely triumphant, and that Lady Saxondale was utterly humiliated.

"Yes—to-morrow," said the latter, "immediately after breakfast, I shall leave Saxondale Castle—most likely for ever! It is my intention to repair to the Continent, and to live in tranquil seclusion for the remainder of my days. Again therefore do I beseech that the last few hours we are to spend in each other's society, may be embittered as little as possible by allusions to the past."

Her ladyship thus spoke in order to throw Edmund and Adelaide completely off their guard: and for the purpose of still more convincing them of her sincerity, she wore a desponding, a dejected, and a humiliated look, as if feeling herself completely vanquished and prostrated. But all the while she had a certain plan agitating in her thoughts,—a plan which, if successfully carried out, would not merely rid her of Adelaide, but would place Edmund completely in her power. It was a hideous and a diabolical plan—the most fiendlike which had ever yet entered the mind of this desperate and unscrupulous woman. If there be degrees in guilt—if there be shades and hues, some deeper and darker than others, in the sphere of criminality—then assuredly had Lady Saxondale prepared to stain her soul with the blackest and the deadliest of all.

After having spoken at the breakfast-table in the manner already described, she wandered about from room to room, collecting such of her trinkets as she fancied to take with her, or might seem to fancy for such a purpose: and in short, she appeared occupied with her preparations for departure. But all the while she was watching for an opportunity to speak to Edmund alone; and this opportunity was somewhat difficult to be obtained, inasmuch as Adelaide kept almost incessantly with her husband. But just before luncheon-time, Adelaide ascended to her chamber to make some little change in her toilet; and Lady Saxondale, anticipating this movement, watched her from her own room as she passed along the passage. She then glided to the apartment where she hoped to encounter Edmund: nor was she disappointed—for she found him there alone.

"Edmund—dearest Edmund," she hastily said, adopting a tone and manner of affectionate kindness,—"it is absolutely necessary I should have half-an-hour's conversation with you. You know not the importance of the matter on which I thus seek to enlighten you——Yes, terribly enlighten you! You are in danger—you stand upon a precipice—and I alone can save you!"

When Lady Saxondale first began speaking with that air of seeming kindness, Edmund gave one of his insolently supercilious smiles, and was about to tell her "not to bother him:" but the concluding words that thus met his ears, and the awfully impressive tone and look of warning which accompanied them, struck terror to his heart.

"What do you mean, mother?" he said. "Pray don't keep me in suspense."

"I cannot tell you now. Adelaide will return in a few minutes: she must not see us speaking together!"

"Then is it about her?" demanded Edmund, nervously.

"Do not question me now. I will tell you all presently: you shall *then* judge whether what I have to say is important or not. But I charge you not to breathe a syllable to your wife! Do not let her perceive there is any new secret between us! You must give me an opportunity——"

"I know how!" quickly interrupted Edmund, who was most seriously frightened. "When I go up to dress for dinner, I will steal out of my toilet-room and come to your chamber."

"I will be there," answered Lady Saxondale. "And now compose yourself!—be as usual towards Adelaide! You know not how much depends upon your behaviour in this respect!"

Having thus spoken, Lady Saxondale hurried from the room, and flitted back to her own chamber. There she remained about ten minutes until the bell rang for luncheon, when she proceeded to the apartment where it was served. Edmund and Adelaide were already there; and a glance showed her that the former was maintaining his wonted demeanour towards his wife—so that her ladyship felt assured she had succeeded in thoroughly frightening the young nobleman into silence. When the repast was over, Lady Saxondale retired altogether to her own chamber; and remained there, occupied with her thoughts, until about half-past six o'clock,—when the door opened, and Edmund made his appearance.

"Now, mother, for heaven's sake what is it?" he exclaimed, his looks showing how strong was the impression which her words had made upon him in the middle of the day.

"You must be calm, Edmund—you must summon all your courage and all your self-possession to your aid! Indeed, you never in all your life required the exercise of the strongest power of self-control so much as you do at present."

"Go on, mother! I will do as you tell me! See, I am composed. Now, what is it?"

"Did you ever hear, Edmund, of a certain Count de St. Gerard?"—and as Lady Saxondale thus spoke, she fixed her large dark eyes penetratingly upon the young man's mean and ignoble countenance, to ascertain the impression which the mention of that name would create.

"St. Gerard? Yes, to be sure!" he answered, a strong feeling of jealousy at once springing up within him.

"And you have read—or you have heard," continued her ladyship, "the full particulars of

Adelaide's trial in Paris, upwards of two years ago."

"Yes—I have read it, every syllable!"

"And the name of the Count de St. Gerard figured therein?"

"It did, mother. But what then? Was it not shown——"

"Never mind what *seemed* to be shown," interrupted Lady Saxondale impressively. "I tell you that the Count de St. Gerard was Adelaide's paramour!"

"If I thought it!" muttered Edmund, becoming pale as death.

"If you thought it?" echoed Lady Saxondale. "I tell you it is true! And what is more, that same Count de St. Gerard has followed Adelaide to England—and he has written to her."

"Mother, this is some tale of your's to answer some new purpose!"—and Edmund stopped short, for his teeth were set suddenly with a cold paroxysm of concentrated rage.

"Foolish boy! what object have I *now* to gain in deceiving you? Am I not to leave Lincolnshire to-morrow—and to quit the country in a few days? It is your very life which is at stake! I tell you the Count de St. Gerard is in England—and she who murdered one husband for the sake of her paramour, will not scruple to do the same by another! Edmund, are you aware who was the author of your release from Dr. Ferney's house?"

"I don't know," quickly responded the young nobleman. "That man Chiffin——"

"Yes—but by whom, think you, he was employed?" interrupted Lady Saxondale. "The Count de St. Gerard! He was one of the two gentlemen whom you met in Hanover Square, where the post-chaise was in readiness."

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund, quivering from head to foot with a cold terror. "Those two gentlemen were muffled in cloaks: one was evidently an Englishman—the other, I recollect, never spoke a syllable during the few moments we were together——"

"And that other who spoke not, and who stood a little aside," added Lady Saxondale, "was the Count de St. Gerard! Was he not a tall, slender young man—about six-and-twenty—of very genteel appearance—and wearing a black moustache?"

"True!" ejaculated Edmund, full of excitement. "But how know you all this?"

"What matter how it came to my knowledge?" demanded his mother: "you perceive that what I tell you is the truth. Nay, more—to speak candidly, I intercepted a letter from the Count to Adelaide——"

"Show it me!" cried Edmund, vehemently: and still was he quivering with the excitement of his jealous feelings.

"Nay—I have it not," responded her ladyship. "I resealed it, and suffered it to reach Adelaide's hands. It suited my purpose to do this."

"But what said the note?" inquired Edmund.

"It was such as a paramour would write to his mistress: it was couched in the most endearing terms—it left no doubt in my mind as to Adelaide's guilt in many respects—guilt as to the murder of her first husband—guilt as to her intercourse with St. Gerard—guilt as to her utter selfishness in inveigling you into a marriage—and guilt as to her intentions towards you!"

"And those intentions?" demanded the young nobleman, trembling more than he had ever heretofore done.

Lady Saxondale bent upon him a fearfully ominous look; and in a low but impressive manner, replied, "Her intentions are to treat you as she treated her first husband——to take you off by poison!"

"My God!" muttered Edmund, staggering back with indescribable horror upon his ghastly pale countenance.

"Yes—and the vile woman," continued Lady Saxondale, inwardly chuckling as she saw how effectively her words struck the unfortunate Edmund blow upon blow,—"the vile woman has all along laughed at you!—she has ridiculed—she has mocked you—she despises and hates you. Her paramour's letter to her proved this much!"

"But wherefore did she not marry the Count de St. Gerard?" demanded Edmund quickly.

"Because he was not rich enough to support her in the extravagant style in which she is accustomed to live. She married you in order to obtain an income settled upon herself: and this she has got. Now—her purpose being fully served—she will make away with you, Edmund, that she may in due course become the wife of him whom she has all along loved!"

"But, mother, what you tell me is horrible—horrible!" and Edmund literally shivered in the excruciation of his agonized feelings. "Oh, I will fly from her!——No, I will order the lacqueys to turn her out——"

"Madman that you are!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, catching him by the arm as he was springing to the chamber-door: "do you think that a wily woman, such as she is, will not find means to accomplish her purpose even though you eject her? Yes—rest assured that sooner or later you would be taken off by some means or another!"

"My God, what am I to do?" and Edmund sank upon a chair, a prey to mingled feelings of jealous rage and horrible apprehensions. "But why," he suddenly exclaimed, "did she have me rescued from Dr. Ferney's?—would it not have suited her purpose to leave me there?"

"Must I explain everything, even to the minutest details?" demanded Lady Saxondale, impatiently: "can you not fathom anything for yourself? can you not penetrate a single one of her purposes? How could she make away with you while you were at Dr. Ferney's? was it not absolutely necessary for her to have you with her? and does not the fact of St. Gerard being the real author of your liberation, prove the concert which exists between him and Adelaide? Nay, I will tell you more!—it was in consequence of reading the intercepted letter, that I discovered the plan which was contemplated for your deliverance; and therefore did I have you hastily removed from Dr. Burdett's to Dr. Ferney's."

"Oh! what am I to do? what am I to do?" ejaculated the miserable Edmund, wringing his hands: then, in the abject wretchedness of his feelings, he threw himself at Lady Saxondale's feet, saying, "Save me, mother! You told me just now that you alone can save me!—pray do it—and I will never go against your wishes any more!"

"When I said I would save you, Edmund,"

she answered, compelling him to rise up from his suppliant posture, "I meant that I would counsel you how to save yourself."

"I will go to a magistrate—I will hurry off to Hawkshaw or to Denison—I will go to the constable at Gainsborough—anything to get rid of this dreadful woman!"—and he was fearfully excited.

"Insensate boy! will you be tranquillized?" exclaimed her ladyship sternly—though in her heart rejoicing with a fiendish satisfaction at these violent gusts of passion, which showed how effectually she had instilled the poison of jealousy and infused the influence of terror into his soul. "What would you say to a magistrate? It would be a mere vague and unsupported accusation. I could not stand forward as a witness——Alas! now you perceive the consequences of having done your best to place me in that woman's power! But is it possible, Edmund, you have been all along so infatuated as never to entertain the slightest misgiving as to her intentions towards you?"

"Misgiving?" echoed Edmund: "I have seldom been free from it! I have been haunted by vague terrors: my fears have followed me in my dreams—I have fancied that I was encircled in the coils of a monstrous serpent——"

"And as you live," cried Lady Saxondale, "it *is* a serpent in whose power you have placed yourself! Know you not that the most venomous of snakes have the fairest and loveliest of skins? Oh, my poor boy!" she added, pretending to be affected unto tears, and to be seized with a sudden revival of love towards one whom she in reality hated with the most cordial detestation,—"you must be guided by my counsel! it is for me to save you!"

"Speak, mother—speak!" exclaimed Edmund, completely beguiled by the tone, the look, and the manner she had assumed.

"You see the position in which you are placed," continued her ladyship. "Adelaide menaces your life: if she should fail, St. Gerard will take it. They have vowed between them that you shall perish by poison, or fall beneath the assassin's knife. Adelaide, who murdered one husband, is familiar with crime and all its means and resources, and will not scruple to attempt the life of a second husband. But if she fail, her paramour is ready to take up the enterprise; and he who so well knew how and where to find a ready agent to deliver you from the mad-house, will know how and where to find the same or another to have you waylaid and assassinated."

"Mother, speak!—what am I to do?" asked Edmund, in a deep hollow voice.

"What are you to do? Are you a man—and do you not in the first place pant for revenge against the woman who has beguiled you with her treachery, who has dishonoured you with her profligacy, and who now meditates your death?"

"Yes—revenge! revenge!" muttered Edmund, whose fiendish malignity of disposition was terribly excited.

"Well then, revenge!" resumed her ladyship; "and at the same instant you consummate your revenge, may you rid yourself for ever of this demoness in human shape who seeks your life!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Edmund: but again he quivered all over as he said, "You mean, mother, that I must take *her* life?"

"And wherefore not?" demanded Lady Saxondale. "Is it not in self-defence? If she attacked you with a sword, would you not snatch it from her grasp, if you could, and slay her therewith?—and is she not now meditating by insidious means to take your life? Are not all the blandishments she lavishes upon you, so many subtleties to lull you into a false security? Shall you not therefore be justified in tearing the weapons from her grasp—turning round upon her suddenly—and dealing her the death which she purposes to overtake you?"

"Would you have me poison her?" inquired Edmund, with a look of unfeigned horror.

"Aye—poison her! Why not? But no," added Lady Saxondale more slowly, as she reflected that after the tragedy of Mabel Stewart, a recurrence of a sudden death in the family might seem suspicious. "Some other plan must be adopted. But first of all, Edmund—tell me, are you resolved?"

"I am, mother!" was the response. "It is my only alternative—the only means by which I can possibly save myself."

"You never spoke anything more truly. Now look you, Edmund: the River Trent rolls deep near the bridge—and the banks are high. A female, if plunged into those waters, and encumbered by her apparel, could not scramble up the shore, if he who thrust her in was prompt and resolute in driving her back. She must drown—she must die! Nothing could save a woman in such a case! Well, even now you scarcely seem to understand me: you gaze upon me with a sort of vacancy, as if I must be explicit in every detail, even the minutest. Then be it so!"

"Proceed, mother," said the young nobleman, now quivering nervously again.

"To-morrow," resumed Lady Saxondale,—"yes, to-morrow, I say; for delay is dangerous, and you know not how soon after I am gone, the drop of poison may be poured into your coffee or your wine—or how, when you are sleeping, the phial of venom may be placed to your lips——"

"Horror!" groaned the miserable young man, whose feelings were worked up to just the very pitch which Lady Saxondale desired.

"Yes — to-morrow, I say," she continued,—"when I have taken my departure, you and Adelaide can walk out together. She will be all endearing blandishments—you must be all apparent confidence; and you will chuckle, and rejoice, and laugh together, at having got rid of me. You will lead Adelaide along the bank of the river: there is a beaten pathway—and it is pleasant walking there on these fine frosty days. When at a sufficient distance from the castle, and beyond the bridge—where the water runs so deep, the stream is so wide, and the banks are so high—you will sweep your eyes around to assure yourself that no observer is near, and you will suddenly thrust her into the river. Need I say any more? Her cries will echo around: *you* may raise shouts of seeming horror and vociferate for help. If those shouts are heard, so much the better: the more effective gloss will be thrown over the deed. In any case, when you see that she has sunk the third time——remember, Edmund, the *third* time!—you may

rush away—you may hasten back with all the appearance of frenzy and frantic grief to the castle—you may proclaim that a terrible accident has deprived you of your beloved wife. Now, have you the courage of a man——Yes, you *must* have when you think of all your wrongs! And I warn you to be deluded not by her blandishments! The more endearing they may become, rest assured the nearer is the hour when the fatal poison is to be administered. It is for you to anticipate it:—it is for you to save yourself by making away with *her*——Aye, and avenge yourself at the same time! Will you do it?"

"I will, mother!"—and Lady Saxondale saw that Edmund was resolved.

"But in the meanwhile, everything depends upon the demeanour you assume. Remember, she is keen and penetrating: a word or a look will betray you!—and if so, your life, even *before* my departure, is not worth a single hour's purchase. Now go!—return to your dressing-room—and when we meet at the dinner-table, let me see that you for once in your life can model yourself to the exigences of the occasion, and maintain the strictest control over your feelings."

Lady Saxondale and Edmund separated for the present,—he returning to his toilet-chamber, she remaining in her own apartment,—he to compose his feelings as well as he was able, she to chuckle over the detestable scheme which she had devised and which appeared to have every prospect of terminating as terribly and as tragically as she could wish. The reader cannot have failed to perceive how artfully and how skilfully this designing woman had seized upon certain incidents—had given a different complexion to them—had tortured and twisted them, so as to suit her own purpose—and had accumulated a terrific mass of evidence against Adelaide. Bad though Edmund's wife herself was, yet was Lady Saxondale's story utterly devoid of foundation: for the Count de St. Gerard was not, nor ever had been, Adelaide's paramour: he was incapable of conniving at a murderous intent, much less of entertaining one to be executed by himself;—and Adelaide harboured not the slightest idea inimical to her husband's life.

Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the dinner-table; and the first rapid searching glance which her ladyship threw upon them both, convinced her that Edmund was exercising more presence of mind than he had ever before displayed, and that his wife suspected nothing wrong. In the same manner did the evening pass away; and when they sought their chambers, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "I shall triumph yet."

But it cost Edmund a tremendous effort thus to cast a veil over his real feelings, and maintain his wonted demeanour towards his wife. He however succeeded in doing so. Firmly believing every syllable his mother had told him, because her statement appeared to be so fully borne out by a variety of facts within his own knowledge,—he regarded Adelaide as an intending murderess in respect to himself; and therefore felt that his life depended wholly and solely on his own conduct and bearing towards her. Thus did the very desperation of his position, as he believed it to be, arm him with a kind of courage which he had never experienced before. But when he went to sleep, the horrors of his waking thoughts followed him in his dreams; and once again did he fancy that he was writhing in the immense coils of a fearful serpent tightening around him. So powerful were his convulsive movements—his spasmodic throes—his heavings, and tossings, and strugglings in his sleep, that his wife was awakened by them: and when, believing him to be labouring under the influence of some terrible night-mare, she kissed him,—for it was her policy now to enchain him to her by the tenderest blandishments,—his fevered imagination made him fancy that the reptile which encircled him, was licking him with its forked tongue, to cover him with its loathsome saliva previous to the process of deglutition. He awoke with a strong start and a wild cry: but fortunately, ere his wildering senses became collected, he gave utterance to no word which betrayed what was uppermost in his mind. Adelaide therefore still retained the belief that he had been labouring under the influence of a night-mare; and when he composed himself to slumber again, it was far less disturbed.

The morning came: Lady Saxondale, Edmund, and Adelaide met at the breakfast-table; and still was the first-mentioned of the three satisfied that the other two were in the same relative position as on the previous evening—namely, that Edmund had said nothing to excite Adelaide's suspicions, and that she herself remained without the slightest misgiving. The travelling-carriage was ordered to be ready for Lady Saxondale at ten o'clock; and the moment for departure arrived.

"I am about to leave you, according to my promise," said her ladyship, addressing Edmund and Adelaide. "Farewell!"

She extended her hand to her daughter-in-law, who held it for an instant with a look of cold reserve: she then proffered it to Edmund, who pressed it far more warmly, as if in gratitude for the warning and the counsel she had given him on the preceding day, as well as a significant assurance that her advice should not be disregarded. She descended to the carriage,—Edmund and Adelaide accompanying her to the threshold of the castle, for the sake of appearances. She found an opportunity to dart one rapid look of deep meaning upon Edmund—and stepped into the vehicle.

It rolled away; and Adelaide whispered to her husband, as she accompanied him back to the drawing-room, "Your lady-mother has a fine day for her journey,"—the words being uttered with a smile of mingled irony and triumph.

"Yes, dearest Adelaide," answered Edmund,—"so fine that, if you please, you and I will enjoy it likewise for ourselves. We will ramble forth together; and while exchanging congratulations at having got rid of my mother, will discuss our plans for the future."

CHAPTER CLVIII.

THE RIVER.

Lord Saxondale and his wife rambled forth from the castle, the latter leaning on the arm of the former. Adelaide was now completely happy:

she was entirely without a suspicion that her mother-in-law, ere taking her departure, had instilled such venom into Edmund's veins—or that a mine had been prepared, above which she was unconsciously to tread. She considered that the desperate warfare of plots and counterplots, duplicities and machinations, which had been waged between Edmund's mother and herself, was now altogether at an end—that the former had been worsted—and that she therefore remained triumphant.

We have already said that the very desperation of Edmund's position, as he himself believed it to be, had served to endow him with a degree of fortitude which astonished even himself: that is to say, a particular kind of fortitude—the fortitude which enabled him to wear a mask upon his countenance in the presence of his wife, without betraying the secret thoughts and intents which were agitating within. Indeed, in this respect, his hypocrisy was now consummate; and as those who harbour treacherous intents, invariably assume some extreme feeling in order to veil them,—so was Edmund's manner kinder and more affectionate than ever towards Adelaide. She perceived this as they walked forth together—and naturally attributed it to satisfaction at his mother's departure.

"Now, my dear Edmund," said Adelaide, as she leant upon his arm, and gazed up with her wonted blandishment of look into his countenance,—"at length we are rid of that woman who sought to be such a terrible domestic tyrant. I hope you will not be angry that I speak thus of your mother——"

"Angry?—no!" ejaculated Edmund: "how can I be angry, when for some time past I have looked upon her as my bitterest enemy?"

"Well, she is gone at length," observed Adelaide: "in a few days she will quit England—let us hope never to return. So long as she was here, I trembled for your safety, although I did my best to conceal my fears. You know not, dearest Edmund, how much I love you; and the heart which loves as fondly as mine, is naturally full of apprehensions at the slightest chance of danger to the object of such affection."

"And you do indeed love me as much as you say, my adored Adelaide?" asked Edmund, gazing upon her countenance, which never looked more beautiful than it did at this moment: for the fresh frosty air had heightened the colour upon her cheeks—and the sunny light of satisfaction and triumph was dancing in her eyes.

"Love you, Edmund? You know that I love you!" she murmured, modulating her tones so that the music of her voice, of the melody of which she was fully conscious, might sink down with rapturous sensations into the depths of his soul. "Did I not love you from the very first moment we met?"

"Yes, yes—even as I loved you," he answered: but all the while he felt convinced in his own heart that every syllable she uttered, though glossed with honey, was nevertheless fraught with an envenomed hypocrisy.

On issuing forth from the castle, he had not immediately conducted her near the river,—but through the park, into the fields—and with an air as if it were a matter of indifference which way he went; so that in nothing should his conduct encourage the slightest suspicion in her mind. As they were proceeding along a narrow lane, they heard the sounds of a horse's feet approaching; and as a turn in the road almost immediately revealed the rider to their view, Edmund recognised Mr. Hawkshaw. It was a long time since the young nobleman had seen the Squire—never since he had last inhabited the castle some two or three years back, and when he might be described as a mere lad. He had not however sufficiently altered—and heaven knows had not so much improved in personal appearance—that Mr. Hawkshaw could fail to recognise him also. The recognition was therefore mutual: but while, on the one hand, Edmund saluted the Squire with a cordiality which might be regarded as an overture of friendship—the other returned his salutation with a frigid reserve. If Lord Saxondale had possessed the least degree of proper spirit, he would himself have demonstrated a studied coldness towards the individual who had so signally exposed his sister Juliana — notwithstanding that his sister was flagrantly and foully in the wrong. But Lord Saxondale had no such spirit: he had vanity and conceit—but no real pride, in its loftiest and noblest sense;—and thus was it that, heedless of antecedent circumstances in respect to Hawkshaw and Juliana, he was now anxious enough to avail himself of the present opportunity to renew his acquaintance with one of the leading gentlemen of Lincolnshire.

Mr. Hawkshaw instantaneously comprehended how Lord Saxondale ought to have treated him in revenge for his conduct towards Juliana; and therefore despised him for acting otherwise. He was urging his steed past,—when Saxondale, determined not to be thus almost "cut" by the Squire without an effort to amend matters, advanced a pace or two—stretched forth his hand—and exclaimed, "Well, Mr. Hawkshaw, it is some time since you and I met. I shall be very glad to see you at the Castle——But perhaps you were going there to call?"

"No, my lord—I was not," was the Squire's response, given with a marked emphasis; although at the same time he suffered Edmund to grasp the tips of two of his fingers, as he did not wish to be too pointed in his conduct.

"If you had been, we would have turned back with you," said the young nobleman. "Permit me to introduce you to Lady Saxondale——"

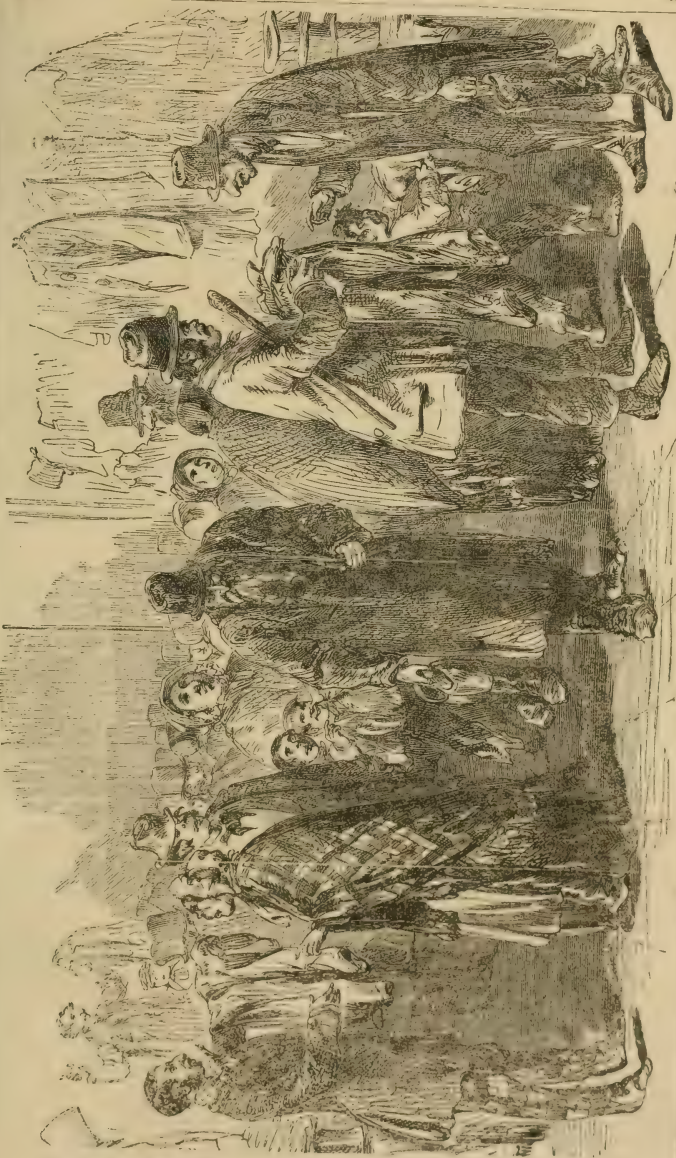
But at that moment the Squire gave another cold and distant bow—colder and more distant than even the first; and galloped onward.

"The unmannerly country bumpkin!" ejaculated Edmund, as Mr. Hawkshaw thus darted away upon his high-spirited steed.

"Do not vex yourself, my dearest husband," said Adelaide, again resuming all her most fascinating wiles, and putting forth the most seductive witcheries which her charms were so well calculated to display. "What care we for the society of the world, when we are all in all to each other?"

"True, dearest Adelaide!" returned Edmund, scarcely able to keep back an expression of bitterness from his countenance: for he thought that Hawkshaw's coldness was altogether on account of his wife, and not at all on account of himself, nor of the family to which he belonged.

The lane now led into a wider road; and Ed-



mund knew that a little farther on there was another diverging lane, conducting towards the river. In this direction did he resolve to proceed. But scarcely had they entered the broader road, when the sounds of an approaching equipage reached their ears; and as it came in sight, Edmund, at once recognising the servants' liveries, hastily said, "The Denisons' carriage!"

It was advancing at only a moderate pace,—as Mr. and Mrs. Denison, with their eldest son and his wife, their daughter-in-law, were taking an airing. There was consequently a sufficient opportunity for the Saxondales to observe them—and for them to observe Edmund and his wife in return. But what pen can describe the bitter mortification of the young nobleman, when he saw the occupants of that vehicle avert their heads in so marked and pointed a manner that there was no possibility of mistaking their intention to give him and Adelaide the cut direct? The equipage passed on its way; and Edmund, utterly humiliated, and quivering with rage, gave vent to some low-muttered imprecation. Again was his wife ready with cajoling blandishments; and he, fearful of exciting in her mind any suspicion of how hateful in every sense she had become to him, appeared to be soothed, and even affected to talk disdainfully and scornfully of "the wretched unmannerly beings who lived in that part of the country."

But if the terrible purpose with which Lady Saxondale had so skilfully imbued her son, had required strengthening, the malevolent intervention of Satan himself could not have conjured up incidents better calculated to achieve that end than these which had just arisen from accident. Too vain and conceited to be willing to admit that it could be in any way on his own account he was thus cut,—Edmund attributed his humiliation and discomfiture entirely to the presence of this woman to whom he had allied himself. In every way, therefore, had she become hateful to him,—hateful as one whom he regarded as being the wanton paramour of another—hateful as the murderess of her first husband—hateful as entertaining murderous intentions towards himself—hateful as the source of disgrace, opprobrium, and infamy, all of which were falling upon his own head. Nevertheless, he still maintained an outward appearance of kindness, affection, and love,—forcing himself even to chat the more gaily the nearer he drew his wife towards the river.

They entered upon the beaten pathway which ran along the bank. In their ramble they had made a partial circuit, which thus brought them back to within a mile of the castle: for it was at no great distance below the bridge that they entered upon the pathway which followed the course of the stream. Adelaide, as she leant upon his arm, was nearest to the river; and as Edmund threw his eyes forward, he perceived a point about fifty yards ahead, at which he well recollected that the bank was higher than elsewhere, and that the path skirted its very edge. He knew likewise that the water was there exceedingly deep; and not a cottage nor a hut was nigh. *That* was the spot he fixed upon to become the theatre of the terrific crime which his mother had suggested, and in the dread purpose of which so many circumstances had combined to strengthen him.

"Excellent fishing at this part of the river, in the season," he observed to Adelaide, thus suddenly breaking a brief interval of silence.

"And are you fond of angling?" she inquired. "If so, when the spring returns, we will ramble forth together—we will seek the most refreshing shades: you shall take your rod—I will bring a book; and thus will we while away the time."

"Yes—and it will be truly delightful," observed Edmund, who experienced such curious and almost horrible sensations, as he neared the particular spot, that he could not altogether conceal the excitement and agitation which possessed him.

"I am afraid, dearest Edmund," said his wife, perceiving the glitter of uneasiness in his eyes, "that you are still troubled by these incidents which have just now occurred? Pray think of them no more. You have rightly described the authors of those insults as persons of uncouth manners."

"Yes, yes—they are so," responded Edmund quickly: and he slackened the pace at which they were walking, as if to postpone as long as possible the fatal instant when the foul deed was to be done.

"Then, wherefore vex yourself on their account?" asked Adelaide, gazing up, with all the power of her assumed fondness, into his face.

"It is not so much on that account—it is not so much for them that I am annoyed——"

"On account of whom, dearest Edmund?"

"My own infernal folly!" he replied bitterly, and with startling suddenness.

"Your folly?"

"Yes—wretch!" and he hurled her into the stream.

A moment before, his looks had been swept around quick as if it were a lightning-flash that was thus circling the wintry landscape: no observer met his view—and thus at the instant the marked-out spot was reached, was his purpose executed. A wild shriek thrilled forth from Adelaide's lips, swiftly followed by a splash and heavy plunge; and for a few moments she disappeared from the view of the wretched murderer, who stood dismayed and horrified on the bank. The circling, and gurgling, and agitation of the water showed where the unfortunate woman was battling and struggling in the depths below. Suddenly she reappeared on the surface; and wild cries again rang forth.

"Edmund—murderer! Help! help! for God's sake help!"—and her countenance, distorted and absolutely hideous with the wild anguish and the dread horror depicted upon it, presented to his dismayed view a spectacle full well calculated to haunt him ever more.

Struggling and battling against the engulfing waters—carried downward by the stream—vainly did the miserable woman endeavour to reach the bank: and a second time did she disappear from the gaze of her murderer. The sudden sinking of that hideous ghastly countenance—a countenance which but a minute before was full of exquisite beauty—smote him as it were with a sense of relief: yes, *smote* him—for the revulsion of feeling was marvellously abrupt from consternation and horror, to comparative presence of mind. Then did Edmund recollect another portion of his mother's instructions: and rushing to and fro along the bank with every appearance of the most

frenzied terror, he shouted for help. All of a sudden his foot slipped—and in he fell. Fortunately for him, however, his hand instantaneously encountered the root of a tree, spreading out beneath the water, from the bank; and he was enabled to scramble safely back to a sure footing upon the land.

"Help, help! in mercy's sake, help! Edmund—villain—murderer——My God, help!" were again the wild cries which rang thrillingly forth in a voice of piercing agony, as for the second time Adelaide rose to the surface.

Edmund, full of horror at the fearful peril which he himself had but that instant escaped from, leant against the tree for support: his brain whirled—he appeared as if in the midst of an appalling dream. Again did the cries of his wife cease: again had she disappeared in the depths of the Trent. More than a minute now elapsed ere she rose again: then it was but for a moment—naught but a gurgling sound, faint, low, and dismal, came from her lips—but her limbs were convulsing and battling desperately. It was a last effort—like the last flutter of a dying bird; and she sank to rise no more alive. Ere she went down, however, this third time, the murderer caught a glimpse of her countenance,—the expression of which was far more hideous with the agonies of death upon it, than it had seemed before.

Again did he recollect his mother's words: he had seen her go down *a third time;*—and giving vent to cries and yells, which indeed seemed full of frenzied horror, he rushed in the direction of the castle. But not many yards had he thus sped, when he beheld a horseman galloping like the wind towards him; and in a few moments Squire Hawkshaw was upon the spot.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" he exclaimed, perceiving Edmund alone, without his hat, and dripping with water.

"My wife! my wife! my beloved Adelaide! There! there!"—and with gestures apparently frantic he pointed to the river.

Then flinging himself upon the bank, he moaned and howled horribly: but it was not altogether *acting*—for his feelings were indeed worked up to a fearful pitch; and the remorse as well as the terror he experienced, were immense.

Hawkshaw sprang from his steed, and hurried rapidly to and fro on the bank, ready to plunge in at the slightest indication which the waters might afford in any particular spot, of the victim being immersed beneath. But the surface had become completely calm once more; and perceiving that all must be over, the Squire hastened to lift Saxondale up and say whatsoever he could to fortify and console him. Not for an instant did Hawkshaw suspect the terrific crime which had just been perpetrated there. How could he? Edmund's last wild cries were those which had reached his ears as he was riding at a distance; and he had only come within view of the scene in time to behold the young nobleman flying as if in frenzy along the bank, and giving vent to lamentations the genuineness of which it was impossible to doubt. Then, too, that accident which befel Lord Saxondale, and which had for a moment threatened his own life, told immensely in his favour: for was it not evident to the mind of the Squire that the distracted husband had boldly plunged in to rescue his wife?

"My lord, my lord," he said, much moved on the young nobleman's behalf, "for heaven's sake, compose yourself! I know the calamity is a dreadful one: but it must be endured with fortitude!"

"Oh! but it is shocking—it is terrible!" cried Edmund: and his accents, his looks, and his whole manner, indicated the wildness and the horror of the most genuine affliction.

"It *is* shocking!" said the Squire, who indeed felt what he thus expressed. "Come, my lord—I will see you to the castle; and we must procure assistance to recover the——"

He stopped short: he would not say "corpse," for fear of exciting fresh paroxysms of bitter woe on the part of him whom he took to be a miserably bereaved husband. And now the Squire, naturally generous-hearted, beheld not in young Saxondale a being who merited his contempt—beheld not in him a member of the family which he had so much reason to detest—beheld not in him the husband of a woman who was all but a branded murderess,—but only a fellow-creature whom a dire misfortune had suddenly overtaken. Nor in the hurry and whirl of his own feelings, had Hawkshaw leisure to reflect (believing the tragedy to be entirely the result of an accident in one sense) that it might be a providential retribution for the crime which Adelaide was but too deeply suspected of having perpetrated in respect to her first husband.

"Come, my lord—let me help you to reach the castle," he said: and sustaining the young nobleman with one arm, he held his horse's bridle in the other,—in which manner they proceeded in the direction of the castellated mansion.

"Oh, Adelaide! Adelaide!" murmured Edmund, thus forcing himself to continue his lamentations: "who could have foreseen this?"

"How did it happen?" asked the Squire, gently and hesitatingly, and displaying all that delicacy with which one fears to probe a deep wound just inflicted.

"Her foot slipped—she was walking a few paces in front of me—and in a moment the water hid her from my view. I plunged in——alas, it was vain!——I could not swim—my own life was nearly lost——Would to heaven I had died with her!"

"My lord," answered Hawkshaw gravely, "there are calamities which are sent to try us in this world, and which though deep and terrible, must nevertheless be borne."

Edmund stopped short—covered his face with his hands—and appeared to sob violently; so that the Squire had the utmost difficulty in persuading him to resume his way to the castle:—or at least it seemed as if there were all this difficulty: and so far as Hawkshaw was concerned, it was precisely the same thing. At length—after several halts, and fresh outbursts of grief, more than half simulated, but still partially arising from remorse—the castellated mansion was reached; when horror and dismay were quickly diffused throughout the household on hearing what had happened. Hawkshaw told the tale; and thus here again, as with himself in the first instance, not the slightest suspicion of foul play was enter-

tained. Edmund was hurried up to his own chamber, disapparelled by his valets, and put to bed: while Hawkshaw, accompanied by several of the servants, provided with materials for dragging the river, returned to the spot where the tragedy had taken place. A groom, mounted on a fleet horse, sped to Gainsborough to procure medical assistance for Lord Saxondale, whom Hawkshaw reported to have been himself half drowned, and whose condition seemed deplorable indeed.

In about a couple of hours, a physician was in attendance. He administered what he considered necessary; and reported to the domestics that though their master's system had sustained a terrific shock, there was no danger of fatal results. After remaining some time with Edmund, he took his leave,—intimating that it would not be necessary for him to call again until the morrow. In the course of the afternoon the corpse of the drowned lady was fished up from the depths of the Trent, and was conveyed to the castle. Hawkshaw undertook to break to Edmund the intelligence that the body had been recovered, and that it was then lying beneath that roof. As a matter of course, there was a fresh scene of apparent grief and anguish on the part of the young nobleman; and Hawkshaw again said and did all he could to strengthen and console him. When Edmund thought fit to suffer himself to be somewhat tranquillized, the Squire delicately hinted that it would be as well if his mother were communicated with by that day's post; and the steward was instructed to write at once to her ladyship at Saxondale House in London,—Edmund stating that although it was his mother's original intention to proceed to the Continent forthwith, in order to pass the remainder of the winter in Italy, he had no doubt she purposed to tarry a day in the metropolis, and would thus receive the letter. It was accordingly despatched; and Mr. Hawkshaw, after generously remaining with Edmund until a late hour in the evening, took his departure for his own abode.

Night came—the first night which this youthful murderer had to pass alone after the perpetration of his stupendous crime. It was a night which he indeed dreaded—a night which he foresaw would be fraught with ineffable horrors for himself. At first he thought of accepting the proposal which his valet made to sit up with him: but then he feared lest in his sleep—*if he could sleep*—he might give utterance to words that would betray the enormity of his guilt; and the scaffold had never ceased to loom, dark and ominous, before his eyes from the moment that the voice of conscience rang the word "*Murderer*" in his ears. So the valet's presence was dispensed with; and at eleven o'clock on this night—the first succeeding his crime—Edmund was alone. *Alone* in that chamber which he had occupied in company with his wife—the wife who was no more—the wife whom he himself had done to death! Ah, it was a loneliness in one sense—an awful loneliness: but in another it was no loneliness at all. He had the companionship of his thoughts—a horrible companionship! His mind had the companionship of the dread images which peopled it—a frightful companionship! And the room too was peopled with grisly ghastly shapes—again a dread companionship!

The wax lights burnt upon the toilet-table—— Oh, not for worlds could the wretched, guilty young man suffer himself now to be in the dark! A fire was blazing in the grate; and the play of its lurid flames on the opposite wall, seemed like spectral shapes gliding past. Edmund tried to sleep: but he dared not keep his eyes closed. Every half-minute did he open them and wildly stare around, in the dread expectation of beholding something horrible standing by his bedside. His nervous startings made the bed-curtains shake; and his blood ran cold with apprehension that a spectre was standing behind those heavy draperies. Often and often, as he thus opened his eyes, did he fancy that he caught a glimpse of some disappearing shape, in any corner of the room to which his looks were at the moment turned. No—he dared not keep his eyes closed! And yet to remain awake the whole night—to lie tossing, and heaving, and convulsing, on his pillow—at one instant with the blood stagnating and congealing into ice in his veins, at another instant tortured with a thrill of fiery agony as if those veins ran with a lightning-fluid——Oh, this was horrible, horrible! Ah, wherefore had he listened to his mother's counsel? wherefore had he done this deed? Vainly did he seek to satisfy his own conscience: vainly did he endeavour to muster, combine, and aggregate every possible argument in order to appease that conscience. He could not! Was he not a murderer? No sophistry could repel this tremendous conviction. And then, what too if Adelaide had been innocent after all? What if she had never harmed a hair of her first husband's head? What if the tale in respect to St. Gerard had been a hideous calumny? What if Edmund had really been beloved by her, and she would sooner have perished than harbour a hostile thought in respect to him? Oh, if it were all so,—then of a still deeper shade was the intensity of his guilt!—of a more hideous blackness was the enormity of his crime!

Yet no: she must have been guilty of everything imputed to her—murderous deeds as well as murderous intents!—guilty of wanton profligacy—guilty of everything that could render her character abominable, hateful, detestable! Well, but still was he justified in taking her life? No, no—ten thousand times no!

Thus was he racked by varied and conflicting thoughts,—sometimes imagining that Adelaide had been innocent—at others feeling convinced that she was really guilty; but yet with the latter hypothesis being no more able to justify his own deep criminality unto himself, than he could with the former belief. For as in the case of that former belief, such attempt at self-justification was impossible,—equally impracticable did it seem in the other. Whichever way he turned—to whatsoever point of view his mental vision was directed—there was only the one stupendous, harrowing, agonizing conviction——he was a murderer!

Hours passed: the wretched young man could not get to sleep. But as the night advanced, he occasionally began to doze off—and would thus be sinking into semi-slumber for a few minutes at a time, when he would start up into complete wakefulness—wild and horrible—with the idea that the cold hand of a corpse was laid upon his cheek: or that the countenance of his murdered wife, ghastly and distorted as he had seen it on the surface of

the water, was looking in upon him through the curtains. Or else it would appear to him that those wild cries of distress which had thrilled agonizingly over the Trent, were still ringing in his ear; and as he started up, he found himself bathed in his own agony—covered with the cold perspiration that burst forth in large drops all over!

But at length he did sleep awhile without such startling interruption: yet it was to dream as horribly. Yes—it was to dream that he stood in a court of justice which was crowded from floor to roof: he beheld the jury, stern and resolute in the performance of their duty—the judge, grave and inflexible—an advocate pleading against him, telling the whole tale as the incident had really happened—and the crowd gazing on him with looks of horror and aversion. He saw the black cap produced—he heard the sentence of death pronounced. He fancied that he threw himself on his feet to implore mercy with a wild cry;—and this wild cry was real enough—for therewith he awoke.

He went to sleep again—and also to dream again. This time it was to behold a scaffold erected—a living ocean of people gathered around the dark and sinister object—the halter pendant to the cross-beam—the hangman ready to do his dreadful work. He fancied himself pinioned, walking by the side of the chaplain—ascending the steps leading to the platform of death. He mounted—he stood upon the drop—the noose was placed round his neck—the white night-cap was drawn over his countenance—the knell was tolling deep and ominous upon his ear. Then from his lips rang forth a pealing cry of agony: he started into fullest wakefulness—the cry which *again in reality* he had sent forth, was still ringing through the room; but the horrible phantasmagoria of the scaffold and the crowd had passed away. It was morning: the light was glimmering in at the casement——Thank heaven, it was morning!

Thus passed Edmund's first night after he had become a murderer——Oh, how was he to endure the approach of a second? how to look forward through the vista of coming years, and to know that they must have as many nights as days?

CHAPTER CLIX.

THE INQUEST.

THE haggard ghastliness which a night full of horrors had left upon Lord Saxondale's countenance, was even more than sufficient to impress the domestics generally with the notion that he profoundly felt his bereavement; and thus was it quite unnecessary for him to simulate any show of grief. Squire Hawkshaw,—with the most generous consideration for the young nobleman whom, before his supposed calamity, he had well nigh "cut,"—called soon after the breakfast-hour at Saxondale Castle, and felt really shocked on beholding the aspect which Edmund's countenance presented. As far as ever from entertaining the slightest suspicion that there was guilt at the bottom, the kind-hearted Squire shared in the opinion of the domestics, that the young nobleman was profoundly afflicted, and that he felt his loss with a greater keenness than might have been conceived on the part of one by no means conspicuous for amiable or generous sensibilities.

This was a day of considerable bustle, even in a house of death. Tailors and milliners arrived from Gainsborough to receive orders for the mourning-apparel of the household generally: the undertaker likewise made his appearance; and in the afternoon an inquest was to be holden. The hours passed; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund, not merely from friendly motives, but likewise because he was to be a principal witness at the inquest. During these hours Edmund paced to and fro in the drawing-room—or else threw himself for a few minutes at a time upon a sofa,—all his conduct and proceedings, however, being full well calculated to sustain the impression of his immense woe. Nor were his excitement and agitation altogether feigned: they arose from the horrors of the preceding night, as the ocean retains the trouble of its waves for some time after the storm has swept by. They arose too from remorse, as well as from apprehension of the coming night;—they arose also from a vague dread of the inquest; for though he saw not how the real truth could be suspected, yet conscience made him a coward;—and they arose likewise from the idea of having to meet his mother; because that she would very probably, for appearance' sake, hasten back into Lincolnshire on receiving the letter, he now began to surmise.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the coroner arrived at Saxondale Castle; and was speedily followed by the persons who had been summoned to serve as the jury, and who consisted chiefly of gentlemen or tenant-farmers dwelling in the neighbourhood. It was in the dining-room that the conclave assembled; and after the usual preliminaries, the coroner and the jury proceeded to view the body. This was merely a formal matter,—those persons contenting themselves with looking into the room where the corpse lay, and then retiring. All this while Edmund remained with Mr. Hawkshaw in the drawing-room. He had not as yet seen the body since it was taken forth from the water; and when once, for the sake of appearances, in the earlier part of the day, he had cried out, in a suddenly feigned paroxysm of despair, "that he would speed to embrace the remains of his beloved Adelaide," the well-meaning Squire had held him back.

The proceedings of the inquest occupied no great length of time. The physician who attended upon Edmund, proved that death in respect to Adelaide had arisen from drowning; and when asked, as a mere matter of form, whether there were indications of violence having been used, he emphatically, and indeed most truthfully, responded in the negative. Edmund was compelled to attend, and give an explanation of how the tragedy had occurred. The mortal terror which seized upon him when he found himself in the presence of the coroner and the jury, took the semblance of an overpowering grief; and thus was all suspicion of foul play still effectually warded off. The account that he rendered was the same as that which he had given to Mr. Hawkshaw,—though a little more detailed: but he was soon suffered to quit the room, the coroner feeling

deeply for him. Mr. Hawkshaw, when examined as a witness, gave his evidence according to his knowledge of the circumstances; and after a brief charge from the coroner, the jury delivered a verdict of "Accidental Death."

While Hawkshaw remained below, Edmund paced the drawing-room in considerable agitation. He was there alone: he could give unrestrained vent to his tortured feelings. Myriads of apprehensions crowded in upon his mind. What if, after all, there had been some witness of the deed—a witness unseen by him? What if such witness should suddenly come forward? Edmund had read of such things in books recording the annals of crime: he knew that by inscrutable means did Providence often bring home guilt to its perpetrator. Yet in spite of these terrors which were haunting him, Edmund's mind had a horrible clearness—an illimitable sense of the necessity of keeping the strictest guard over his looks, his words, and his actions. Thus, as he heard footsteps approaching the room-door, and knew them to be Hawkshaw's, he said to himself, "If I show an anxiety to learn the result of the inquest, I am lost!"

Accordingly, as the Squire entered the apartment, Edmund appeared to be again absorbed in the deepest woe, as if unmindful even that an inquest was being held at all. Yet from Hawkshaw's lips were about to come forth the words that must either confirm all his horrible terrors, or afford a sudden relief to his mind. The words were spoken: the verdict was made known—and Edmund remained with his countenance buried in his kerchief, for fear lest any change of the expression of his features should raise a suspicion where evidently none existed as yet.

The coroner and the jury, having partaken of refreshments which were served up to them, departed to their respective homes; and Mr. Hawkshaw remained with Edmund. He stayed to dinner, being unwilling to leave the unfortunate young nobleman (as he considered him to be) until the last moment: but conceiving it probable that Lady Saxondale might make her appearance that evening—and being naturally disinclined to meet her—he departed at about nine o'clock. Again was Edmund alone, but the least thing in a better frame of mind than he was a few hours back. The grand ordeal had been passed through—the inquest was over—and it had terminated in a way which had relieved his mind from torturing apprehensions. But he had yet two terrors to look in the face. His mother was coming; and the night was coming! At least, the longer he reflected upon the course which Lady Saxondale was likely to pursue, the more convinced was he that she *would* come. And why did he dread to meet her? Because he shrank from the thought of looking in the face any one who could say to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

But his mother—was not she also stained with crime? and did he not know it? Ah, yes! but the knowledge thereof mitigated little, if at all, the dread feeling which he himself must experience, of having put it in the power of any living soul to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

An hour passed: it was ten o'clock. Lady Saxondale must have received the letter at about nine in the morning: if she set off immediately, she might be at the castle now. Ah! no sooner had the young nobleman made this reflection, when the sounds of an equipage dashing up to the gateway, reached his ears. No doubt it was his mother! In a few minutes he would know; and during those few minutes he experienced the acutest suspense: for, as above stated, it was with him a horrible dread to look in the face of any one who even by a glance seemed to say, "Thou art a murderer!"

Footsteps were ascending the stairs: the door opened—and Lady Saxondale made her appearance. For the sake of show in the presence of the domestic who had attended her thither, she threw her arms about Edmund's neck, and from her lips sent forth sounds which passed well enough for sobs. The door closed—the domestic had retired—there was no longer need for hypocrisy; and therefore, abruptly withdrawing herself from Edmund, she flung her gaze upon him. Their eyes met: and the conscience-stricken young man thought that as plain as eyes could speak, those of his mother said to him, "Thou art a murderer!"

He staggered back, and sank on a chair as if annihilated. His feelings were at that moment horrible. Crime had looked crime in the face: and crime had seemed to make crime its own self-reproach. Lady Saxondale, comprehending tolerably well what was passing in Edmund's soul, smiled scornfully for an instant,—as if to be thus overcome by the sense of crime, was a weakness deserving contempt. But as that expression quickly vanished from her features, she recollected the necessity of fortifying Edmund's mind as much as possible, so that he should not be led into a betrayal of his guilt. She forced herself to speak kindly to him; and this perhaps she was the better enabled to do, inasmuch as since he had become criminal, she could hate him a trifle less than she had done before. For if virtue has its affections, so has crime: affinities of positions sometimes engender affinities of feelings. Besides, Lady Saxondale had resolved on pursuing a different course from that which she had heretofore adopted towards Edmund. Sternly resolved to wield the iron sceptre of domestic domination, she nevertheless purposed to treat him with a sufficient amount of kindness and indulgence, after a certain fashion, as would make him insensible of the tyranny of her rule. He was to be her slave without precisely knowing it. Through him would she continue the head of the house of Saxondale, even after his majority should be attained. Nominally he would be the owner of the wide domains and the lordly revenues: but she would virtually exercise supreme control over both. Such was the policy she intended to adopt: such were the prospects which were spread out before her.

Edmund was in that frame of mind when the soothing words of kindness could not be lost upon him, ill-conditioned mortal though he were. Besides, it was a relief for him to reflect that his mother, after all, did not mean to make a reproach of the black guilt which he had perpetrated, and into which she had persuaded him. He accordingly looked up; and he acquired courage from her own firm and resolute demeanour. In less than half-an-hour from the moment of her arrival, she got him to talk upon the incidents of the tragedy. He described the details—stated how generously

Hawkshaw had behaved to him—how accident had positively and literally helped him in his tale by sending the Squire at the moment to the scene of the crime—and how the inquest had passed off favourably. This intelligence, which her ladyship had not previously heard, was most welcome to her; and she was also rejoiced that circumstances should thus have partially smitten down the barriers which had lately existed between Hawkshaw and the Saxondale family. Not that it was to be supposed the Squire would repeat his visits, now that she was once more at the castle: but, at all events, in him she felt assured, from what she now heard, that they possessed a vindicator, should suspicion venture to breathe the surmise that perhaps, after all, Edmund's wife had not come fairly by her death.

The hour for retiring arrived; and Lady Saxondale saw by the ghastly look which Edmund's countenance now wore, that he was afraid of the horrors of the coming night. She said all she could to strengthen his mind: she bade him remember that no human tongue save his and hers could proclaim the secret; and that if he had nothing to fear at the hands of living beings, it was pure idiotic imbecility to give way to superstitious apprehensions. Edmund was encouraged: but when he again found himself alone in his chamber—when his valet was dismissed—and he, disapparelled, was about to enter his couch—he was seized with such a sudden consternation that he could not have been more terrified if a veritable spectre had sprung up before him. Even as he hastened to leap into his bed, he dreaded lest his foot should be caught by the cold hand of death protruded from beneath it. And now did he indeed enter on another frightful ordeal—an ordeal of hours of mental anguish and hideous imaginings—frightful waking fancies alternating with the dreams of fitful and broken slumbers, wherein the wild cries of dying agony thrilling over the Trent, the ghastly countenance which had been upturned from the cold waters towards him, and all the circumstances of the horrible tragedy were painfully, poignantly, vividly revived. And there was that young nobleman, bearing a proud title—possessed of wealth—couched upon down—environed by velvet and satin draperies—in a magnificently furnished room,—there he was, in a state of mind to be envied only by any wretch whose guilt *was* discovered and who was about to expiate it on the scaffold. But if this were not the reality of Edmund's position, he at least experienced all its horrors in his dreams: for again did he behold the tribunal of justice engaged in a trial for murder, where he figured as the principal—again did he behold the dark and ominous scaffold, with all the appalling *paraphernalia* of death, and himself the criminal about to die!

When the cold wintry morning sent its dull glimmering light in at the casements, it found the young man more ghastly, more haggard than before; and as he looked at himself in the mirror, he recoiled with dismay and affright, so changed had he become. When his valet entered to assist in the morning-toilet, the man could not prevent himself from showing how much he was shocked at his master's appearance: but still he suspected not that it was guilty horror, instead of the immensity of woe, which had thus stamped its terrific traces on Edmund's countenance. On descending to the breakfast-parlour, he found his mother already there; and the instant they were alone, Lady Saxondale said, "You have passed a bad night, Edmund."

"Mother," he answered, "a few more such nights as these will either send me to a mad-house, or else hurry me to the grave. Ah! I can understand how it is that people's hair have turned white in a single night—a statement at which I have often been wont to laugh!"

"Edmund, I will not reproach you," answered Lady Saxondale: "I will not tell you that this is an unmanly cowardice: but I will conjure you to exercise greater control over your feelings. You must do it! At present, those about us give you credit for a natural grief: but grief, the sincerest and the severest, becomes toned down; and if you assume not such a demeanour, suspicions will arise. Bear this in your mind—and let it serve to arm you with courage."

"It must, it must!" murmured Edmund. "Yes—I see that you are right."

Several days passed; and it appeared as if the counsel given by Lady Saxondale, was not entirely thrown away upon Edmund. But then he had discovered the means of defying the horrors of the night—or rather of rendering himself unconscious of them. He drank deeply. Lady Saxondale saw it—permitted it—even encouraged it; and when, more than half intoxicated, he went to his bed at night, she attended him to the door of his chamber,—whispering to the valet, "that grief had made sad havoc with his unfortunate master."

We should observe that before the lid of the coffin containing Adelaide's remains, was screwed down, Lady Saxondale and Edmund proceeded together to the chamber where the corpse lay, ostensibly for the purpose of bestowing a last look on those remains. But this was a piece of mockery in perfect keeping with all the other horrible proceedings that were known only unto their own hearts. When alone together in that room, they did not so much as approach the coffin; Edmund could not even bring himself to throw a single glance at it: but when they came forth again, it was with their kerchiefs to their eyes, as if they were both deeply moved.

The funeral took place with considerable pomp, all the domestics following as mourners, and Edmund at their head. The ceremony was over; and Lady Saxondale thought that now the tomb had closed above the *one* object who was so great a barrier to her complete domination, she had effectually ensured her triumph. But yet she felt and she knew that her power was not consolidated. Madge Somers had not yet been disposed of: Lord Harold Staunton had hitherto found no opportunity of carrying out her instructions. This circumstance caused her much uneasiness: for that woman was possessed of a secret which, if once told, would bring utter ruin down upon the head of this patrician lady who had already consummated so many crimes in order to attain her ends. She must go to London to see Lord Harold again—to devise with him some plan to be immediately executed, if that which he had already suggested should prove impossible. She was uneasy, as we have said—but only uneasy: she was not dispirited—much less did she despair. The blow so recently

struck, had inspired her with renewed confidence in herself and her resources. By that blow she had gained two grand ends at once: she had removed Adelaide from her path, and she had got Edmund completely into her power. One more achievement to get Madge Somers out of the way, and she would be entirely safe!

The day after the funeral she and Edmund set out for London. The young nobleman was far from sorry to leave a spot which was associated with the black crime that he had been induced to commit; and during the journey he recovered as much of his wonted cheerfulness as he dared put on under existing circumstances. His mother continued to preserve her kindness of manner towards him,—yet at the same time acting as the supreme authority in all things, and with just a sufficient display of her will as to prove that she meant to be dominant. Edmund rebelled not. It was not that he exactly said to himself he was in his mother's power: because, after all, crime could not betray crime without drawing down destruction on its own head as well as on that of the one denounced. But the real weakness of Edmund's nature now showed itself in yielding voluntarily to a state of more or less dependence. The fact was, Lady Saxondale, with a consummate art, was making herself necessary to him,—anticipating his wants and wishes, studying his comforts, and in a thousand ways suffering him to perceive that her's was after all a master-spirit to which he had better trust as the means of helping him on through that career which, so to speak, had begun anew from the starting-post of a crime.

They arrived in London,—arrived there, dressed in deep mourning; but beyond the Petersfields, Marlow and Malton, and a few—a *very* few other individuals, whom selfish motives rendered the hangers-on of wealthy personages,—they had no friends to come and condole with them on the loss sustained,—assuming such condolence to be acceptable under the circumstances. But for all this Lady Saxondale cared little; and she did her best to prevent Edmund from feeling annoyed at their comparatively isolated position. Indeed, his experience had recently been of this sort; and as his chief sources of enjoyment were now centred in the champagne-bottle and the pleasures of the dinner-table, he was not very difficult to be made contented.

Immediately on their arrival in London, Lady Saxondale sent an intimation of the circumstance to the obscure lodging which, under a feigned name, Lord Harold Staunton was occupying in the vicinage of the Regent's Park; and he delayed not to hasten to the mansion in Park Lane. It was in the evening of the day after her ladyship's return to town with Edmund, that Staunton thus called upon her; and they were at once closeted together to deliberate upon their affairs.

"You look charming, dearest Harriet," said the young nobleman, "in this mourning garb. It becomes you wonderfully: it sets off your grandly handsome figure to the fullest advantage:"—and he threw his arm round her waist as they sat together upon the sofa. "I love you, Harriet——yes, I love you more than ever! And you?"

"I love you also, Harold," she responded, not merely suffering his caresses, but returning them.

For now that Lady Saxondale had no longer a reputation to lose, she had made up her mind to gratify her passions without restraint. Moreover, she had an interest in keeping the young nobleman enchained to her—for she did not intend to fulfil her previously given promise of marrying him: she would never divide with another that power which she had toiled through crimes and waded through iniquities to consolidate: but she would retain him as her paramour, and she knew that by lavishing gold she could not fail to preserve her influence over him.

"And this mourning too," continued Lord Harold, looking significantly in that face upon which he had just been imprinting kisses,—"you are not sorry to wear it under such circumstances?"

"The worst and bitterest enemy I ever encountered," responded Lady Saxondale,—"far worse and far more bitter than even your uncle has proved himself—is now no longer an obstacle in my path. She is gone—and Edmund is completely in my power. He who for a time succeeded in emancipating himself from my shackles, has got them now more closely riven upon his limbs than he had when as a child he dared not attempt to thwart me."

"I understand," observed Harold. "I read in the newspapers the account of how Edmund's wife met her death: and it struck me at the time——"

"Enough! breathe not your thoughts aloud, Harold!" interrupted her ladyship. "Yes—it is so: you have rightly conjectured: there need be no secrets between you and me. Is not Edmund—with his weak and frivolous mind—with his superstitious terrors, and his addiction to the grossest sensualities—is he not completely in my power? But Ah! you know not what else occurred at Saxondale Castle. I dared not write to you upon the subject; and no sooner had I arrived in London the other day, when the letter announcing Adelaide's death summoned me back again; and therefore I had no time to communicate with you."

"But what happened?" inquired Harold, to a certain degree excited by feverish suspense.

"That dress——"

"Ah!" he ejaculated with a quick start; and his countenance became ashy pale.

"Do not be alarmed," his patrician paramour hastened to observe. "Fortunately nothing came of the incident: but at one moment it appeared so frightfully threatening, that I was almost dispossessed of every particle of courage. For, you perceive, as Adelaide knew everything—as Edmund in his weakness and his folly had made her a confidante of all past circumstances—the discovery of that masquerade-dress set her reflecting upon *other* things; and so astute, so cunning was she——"

"I comprehend," said Lord Harold, with a shudder. "She penetrated the mystery of that deed——"

"Yes—she fathomed it; and I fell all of a sudden completely into her power. Ah! there was a moment," continued Lady Saxondale, "when I abandoned myself to despair,—until gradually in my imagination expanded the idea that *she* must be removed. But I ought to observe that the dress fell into the hands of the constable of Gainsborough——"

MAT THE CADGER.

"The constable?" echoed Harold, with another quick start, and flinging his affrighted glances around, as if he apprehended lest the door should burst open and the officers of justice rush in to seize upon him.

"Harold, this is foolish on your part," said Lady Saxondale. "I tell you the danger is past:"—and then she explained the particulars of her interview with the head-constable of Gainsborough.

This led her on to describe the adventures of Chiffin in the chapel—how he was discovered and made prisoner—and how she had effected his release.

"You have passed through a trying ordeal, Harriet," observed Staunton, pressing her towards him.

"Yes: but my power is once again all but consolidated," she answered, with a look of triumph. "There is nothing now to be a source of terror, save and except the one secret which that woman may reveal."

"And this secret," said Lord Harold,—"how is it of such paramount importance? You have never yet informed me: but you have just given me the assurance that henceforth there shall be no concealment of any kind between us."

"Ah, I had forgotten!" responded her ladyship. "This one secret must remain my own—at least for the present. Do not press me, Harold, upon that point."

"I will not—I will not," he answered, so completely ensnared by her beauty as he strained her in his arms, that he was entirely submissive to her will.

"And now, relative to this woman," she continued. "What is the latest intelligence you have obtained concerning her?"

"That she still lies completely prostrate—unable to speak—unable even to move her limbs: but the medical attendant confidently predicts her recovery."

"Then, Harold," immediately added Lady Saxondale, "she must be dealt with speedily. While in this state, the opportunity is most favourable for her removal in pursuance of the plan which I myself suggested to you some time since."

"You know, Harriet, the difficulties with which I have had to contend. Ah! if we had only that man Chiffin to aid us——"

"If we had," replied Lady Saxondale, in a musing manner, "it would be settled in one way or another off-hand. Idiot that I was when aiding him to effect his escape, that I did not bid him come up to London and succour you in the business! However, you must carry out the operations immediately. You know not—indeed you know not—how much depends upon it! Even a risk must be run! Surely, surely you can by some means get William Deveril out of the way for a few hours? A forged letter will do this. Ah, the idea is a good one! Know you if your uncle the Marquis is still at Edenbridge?"

"Yes—I have every reason to believe so," replied Harold.

"And can you not imitate his lordship's hand?" asked Lady Saxondale. "Can you not write a pressing letter, as if coming from your uncle, and urging Mr. Deveril to go to him at once? Then, your assistants being in readiness to act——"

"I understand: it shall be done!" ejaculated Staunton. "Yes—it shall be done without delay."

After a little more conversation, Lady Saxondale and her paramour separated,—the latter issuing forth from the mansion.

He was proceeding along Park Lane in order to reach Oxford Street, whence he purposed to take a cab home,—when by the light of a lamp he perceived the form of a man walking rapidly a little way ahead, and keeping as much in the shade as possible,—in short, evidently striving to escape the notice of passers-by.

"Ah!" ejaculated Lord Harold to himself; "the very man who is so needful to me now!"—and quickening his pace, he found that his suspicion was correct, and that the individual thus proceeding stealthily along, was none other than Chiffin the Cannibal.

"My good fellow," said the young nobleman, "it is fortunate I have thus fallen in with you."

"Ah! is it you, my lord?" observed Chiffin, who was at first somewhat alarmed by hearing such quick footsteps, as if they were in pursuit. "And pray what is there in hand? Some little business to be done? No good though, I'll be bound: or else you wouldn't want my assistance."

"There is money to be earned," answered Harold "and what is more—there is a deed for you to finish, which you once commenced but clumsily left undone."

"And what may that be?" inquired the Cannibal.

"If I mention the name of Madge Somers, you will understand me?"

"Nothing can be plainer, my lord; and when money is to be got and an old spite to be gratified, I'm your man."

"We cannot remain talking here," observed Harold. "Where can we go?"

"Come to my lodging, my lord," responded Chiffin. "It's all safe there: the people are right enough—and there's no danger. Follow me at a distance—and don't lose sight of me."

"Lead on," said Harold: "I shall not miss you."

The Cannibal accordingly proceeded along Park Lane in the direction of Oxford Street. This he rapidly crossed, and soon plunged into Duke Street,—turning thence into a narrow dark alley, where he stopped at the door of a house which, so far as could be judged amidst the obscurity, was of poverty-stricken appearance. Lord Harold speedily joined him; and the Cannibal, letting himself in with a latch-key, conducted the young nobleman up a couple of flights of stairs, into a small back room, where he speedily struck a light. The den was poorly furnished—with a bed, a table, two or three chairs, and some other necessaries: but it seemed a sufficiently secure hiding-place for a person who was so much "wanted" as Mr. Chiffin.

"Sit down, my lord—and make yourself at home," said the Cannibal. "Here's brandy and water. If you've got a cigar you can light it: I don't mind smoke—or more does my landlady, as long as she gets the ready. You see I'm going to blow a cloud:"—and he lighted his pipe accordingly.

"You have had some strange adventures lately,"

observed Harold, looking rather suspiciously around the room, and not feeling over comfortable in the Cannibal's quarters, despite the kind invitation to make himself at home.

"Adventures—ah!" growled Chiffin: "rum 'uns enough too. But as you was in Park Lane, I suppose you have been to see my very particklar and intimate friend her ladyship; and so she has no doubt told you all about it. But adventures are always tumbling down upon me; and a precious one I had this morning too, I can tell you. You see, my lord, I thought this toggery of mine had better be changed: but as I didn't like to walk right bang into a Regent Street tailor's and order a fashionable suit, it struck me as how I would go down to the quarters where those honest folks of Jews deal in second-hand articles. They are not such impudent fellers as to ask any questions if so be they only get their price. So having made up my mind to rig myself out afresh, and convert myself into a real genelman—all the better to get out of the country, which I mean to do as soon as possible—I toddled off towards Houndsditch. I needn't tell your lordship that I don't patronise the great thoroughfares, but keep as much as possible in the back lanes and alleys. That's the way I take my walks. Well, at length I found myself in Houndsditch: and just past Phil's Buildings stands the new Exchange——"

"The Exchange?" ejaculated Lord Harold. "I always thought it was on Cornhill, close by the Bank of England."

"Lord bless your lordship's ignorance!" exclaimed Chiffin. "I didn't mean the Exchange where such tip-top fellers as Rothschild and them sort of coves go. I mean the Jews' Exchange in Houndsditch. It was only built a year or two ago, by a Mr. Isaac; and so you may take your salvation oath he was a Jew by the name. Well, there's a toll at the entrance; and I had to fork out a halfpenny for going in as a buyer. And when I did get in—for I had never been there before in my life—I was astonished!"

"The magnificence of the place, I suppose?" observed Harold.

"Magnificence of fiddlesticks," exclaimed Chiffin. "No—not that. I mean I was astonished at the rum figures I saw, and the lots of toggery spread out on every side. I really fancied the whole twelve tribes of Israel——there was twelve, wasn't there?——Ah, I thought so. Well, the whole of the twelve tribes seemed to be there. Men, and women, and children—all Jews, and no mistake—save and except a few Christians like me, that came as buyers. Your lordship smiles: but I suppose you call yourself a Christian—and why shouldn't I? Howsumever, there I was in the middle of that Exchange, surrounded by such quantities of clothes of all shapes, sizes, and colours, that there was enough to suit and fit a whole tribe of naked Indians, if any of them Missionary Societies should be at a loss for toggery to send out to clothe them with. And such a clatter of voices too—it was as stunning as Babel! Presently I saw one venerable old Jew in a gaberdine—with a long beard—a pair of top-boots in one hand—and his bag over his shoulder; and he looked uncommon suspicious at me, as if he thought I meant to take an advantage of him. The idea of an innocent say-nothing-to-nobody sort of a genelman like me, faucying he could take in a Jew! But I presently recollected that I had seen this identical old file at the *Billy Goat*—— that's a public-house in Agar Town; and I got rather funky. For thinks I to myself, the old file might go and peach for the sake of the reward. So, as he was looking at me askance from under his battered old hat, I turned towards a stall: and snatching up a pair of unmentionables, asked the price. A shambling lanky feller of a Jew, with a long frock-coat on that was never made for him, —and he too was carrying a pair of boots in his hand,— asks me thirty shillings, swearing they was dirt cheap and that he would lose by the bargain. I was just telling him, in no very complimentary terms, that I thought it a dead take-in, —when a voice whispered over my shoulder, 'They'll be very cheap, Mr. Chiffin, at a hundred pounds.'—Now, my lord, I'm no coward; I scarce know what cowardice is: but 'pon my soul, any one might have knocked me down with a straw: for without turning my head, I knew uncommon well it was that old rascal of a Jew with the long beard and greasy gaberdine. So then he fronts me: and fixing his piercing eyes upon me, says, says he, 'I know Mr. Chiffin is a genelman, which always has plenty of money about him:'—and then he winked in a knowing manner, so that I couldn't be off guessing what he meant. The fact is, my lord, I did a certain little business at that public-house where I had seen the old Jew——"

"Yes, yes—I know it," interrupted Lord Harold, somewhat impatiently; for he liked as little as might be to have to listen to the Cannibal's story: but at the same time it did not answer his purpose to offend the man. "So I suppose you had to give a large sum of money?"

"Well, my lord," continued Chiffin, "the short and the long of it was that this old Jew whispered to the long lanky feller which was showing me the unmentionables; and they asked me to step along with them to the nearest public-house, where we might talk certain little matters over. I did not dare refuse: they might have raised a hue and cry, and I should have been done for. So we went away together. The old Jew asked for a private room: and when we were all three closeted there, he told me as cool as possible that if I didn't give him every farthing I had about me, he would shout out for the constables. There was a pretty plight for a genelman like me to be in!—and as a matter of course I was as powerless as a child in their hands. I could not even prevent them from searching me as they chose: 'cos why, though I was strong enough to knock 'em both into the middle of next week, or smash 'em up into little bits, yet I didn't dare raise a finger or even look savage, for fear lest they should give the alarm. Well, my lord, as I am telling you, I was just like a child in their hands; and as I've lately made it a rule to carry about with me all I possess—'cos why, I was some time ago robbed by a pal of mine named Tony Wilkins, when I left my money locked up in a cupboard——"

"Then I suppose these Jews plundered you of every farthing?" observed Lord Harold, with an increasing impatience, which he could no longer conceal.

"All except a little loose silver and a few halfpence," replied Chiffin, with a horribly savage ex-

pression of countenance; "and they would not even give me them inexpressibles that I had been bargaining for. So I made the best of my way off from that public-house, and went down to another that I knowed of in Wapping. There I stayed till about a couple of hours back,—when I thought to myself I would just go and call at Saxondale House, and see whether her ladyship was at home: for if so, I knew she wouldn't leave an old friend in trouble and danger. So I tramped all the way from Wapping to Park Lane: but just as I was going to knock at the door, I twigged a couple of constables standing talking close by a lamp-post; and I therefore thought I had better move on a bit. Then your lordship soon after overtook me; and so, as the tale-writers say, I've brought down my history and adventures to the present moment."

"It therefore appears," observed Lord Harold, "that your finances are in no very flourishing condition?"

"As low as they well can be," answered Chiffin. "A many times I have wanted to get clear out of the country, and take my gentility and good looks to America: but somehow or another, things have always turned up to keep me in England, and prevent me from affording the Yankees the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with such a celebrated character as I am. This time, however, if I can only get the wherewith—and which your lordship seems to promise—it won't be very long before I take my departure."

"Then listen," said Lord Harold Staunton: "and I will explain the object which I have in view. That woman of whom I spoke—Madge Somers—still lies an invalid at Mr. Deveril's house. It suits my purpose—no matter why—that she should be removed thence——ultimately to be made away with," added the young nobleman, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"Well, my lord, nothing is easier than this," answered Chiffin. "But why not have her made away with on the spot?"

"No: such a deed as *that* would create too tremendous a sensation," rejoined Harold: "whereas, if she be simply borne away in the first instance, those from whose care she is taken will remain in the dark as to her fate; and a letter may be written to them a day or two afterwards, to assure them that the woman is comfortable and in good quarters, but that there are circumstances which render it necessary she should thus be retained in a seclusion which it will be useless for them to make any endeavour to penetrate."

"Have your own way, my lord," responded Chiffin: "it's your concern—not mine; and if you pay, I am bound to follow your lordship's directions. Where is she to be taken to?"

"To some great distance," answered Lord Harold,—"and under circumstances the best calculated to break off all clue to the route thus taken. But," he added, with an ominous expression of countenance, "she is to be made away with! Need I say more on this point?"

"Not a syllable, my lord," responded Chiffin, with a grim look of intelligence.

"But there are other matters with which you must be made acquainted," resumed Harold. "I have already engaged some men to act, when opportunity shall serve, in this business——"

"Who are they?" demanded the Cannibal quickly.

"They bear the euphonious names of Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill," returned Lord Harold.

"I know 'em well," said Chiffin. "How came your lordship to be acquainted with such pleasant and agreeable individuals?"

"Some months ago I was led by curiosity to some horrible den in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane, kept by a certain Widow Burley and her two daughters——"

"Enough!" interrupted the Cannibal. "I understand. Biddy Burley is the mistress of Mat the Cadger, and Polly Burley of Spider Bill. So I suppose you got at these chaps by means of them Burleys?"

"Exactly so," answered Lord Harold. "I presume you will not refuse to act with them? They want a man of your energy to lead them in the matter."

"To be sure they do!" ejaculated Chiffin, with a smile of satisfaction, as if he knew full well that his astuteness and courage must invariably place him at the head of any villanous expedition or iniquitous venture with which he might become connected. "All your lordship has got to do is to tell them to come to me. I know they are to be trusted; and we'll lay our heads together."

Some further conversation took place between the young nobleman and Chiffin the Cannibal;—and the former, having given the latter some money for his present purposes, took his departure.

CHAPTER CLXI.

THE VILLA.

We must now return to the villa near the Regent's Park—that villa which was the home of William and Angela Deveril, and at which Madge Somers still lay upon the bed of illness. The reader has already learnt how she experienced a most serious relapse in consequence of her endeavour to commit to a slate those words which she could not speak with the tongue, but to which she was so impatient to give utterance. Some weeks had now elapsed since that period when she did succeed in committing to the slate this brief and unfinished sentence:—"*William Deveril is the s*——." During that interval her position had been most dangerous; and were it not for the assiduous ministrations of the beauteous Angela, she must have succumbed. The medical man who was in attendance upon her, frequently declared that to Miss Deveril's kind attentions—even more than to his own skill—was the invalid indebted for the prolongation of her life; and that to the same cause she would chiefly owe her recovery, should it eventually take place.

Within the last few days previous to the date to which our narrative has been brought, the medical attendant had been enabled to predict with confidence that she would recover: but still, as Lord Harold had ascertained, she lay prostrate and powerless—speechless—and so weak as scarcely to be able to acknowledge by signs the attentions she received from Miss Deveril. This young lady had

not absented herself from the villa, save for an hour's daily walk with her brother, ever since that brief visit which they paid together to Edenbridge Park, and when Francis Paton avowed his love. But on several occasions Frank had journeyed up from Kent to see his betrothed; and frequent was the epistolary correspondence between them. William Deveril still continued to call regularly upon his charming and well-beloved Florina in Cavendish Square;—and thus stood matters at the time when Lord Harold Staunton encountered Chiffin, as described in the preceding chapter.

It was in the morning of the second day after this encounter, that a letter bearing the Edenbridge post-mark, was delivered at the villa. It was addressed to William Deveril; and its contents were found to be as follow:—

"Edenbridge Park, December 22nd, 1844.

"My dear Deveril,

"Something has transpired which renders it necessary that I should see you to-morrow evening (the 23rd) at the Park. You had better leave London so as to be with us at the dinner-hour. Of course you will stay the night: but if you be anxious to return home soon, I will let you depart on the following day. Do not alarm yourself unnecessarily as to the nature of the business to which I have so distantly alluded: for though of importance, and requiring prompt attention, it need nevertheless excite no apprehensi n.

"We all join in kindest regards to your amiable sister and yourself; and believe me to remain,

"Your sincere friend,

"EAGLEDEAN."

This letter was received at the villa while the brother and sister were seated at the breakfast-table. William had at once exclaimed that it was from the Marquis of Eagledean,—not merely because he perceived the Edenbridge post-mark, but likewise because he fancied that it was his lordship's handwriting. But as he read the letter, his countenance gradually expressed a look of suspicion and mistrust,—so that Angela observed him with an increasing degree of anxiety.

"I hope, dear brother, there is nothing wrong?" she said.

"Read for yourself, Angela," he answered, giving her the letter. "And now what do you think?" he inquired when she had perused it.

"There certainly appears something strange in the wording of the contents," replied Angela, also mystified and suspicious: "and yet it is his lordship's handwriting—here too is the Edenbridge postmark——

"But observe, my dear sister," interrupted our young hero. "This letter addresses me as '*My dear Deveril*,'—whereas the Marquis invariably writes to me as '*My dear William*.' It speaks of '*kindest regards*,' whereas the term is wont to be either '*most affectionate regards*' or '*kindest love*:' and instead of '*your sincere friend*,' his lordship is accustomed to subscribe himself '*Your's affectionately*,' or '*Your affectionate friend*.' Trivial as the variations in this letter may seem from his lordship's habitual manner of communicating with me, they are nevertheless important when a suspicion is excited."

"True!" observed Angela, thoughtfully as well as anxiously. "But what do you suspect?"

"I know not, dear sister: and yet I am afraid that some treachery is at the bottom of this note. Indeed," he continued, having taken up the letter again and considered it attentively, "I am now all but convinced that this is not even the handwriting of the Marquis, excellent though the imitation be. Angela, it is a forgery—I feel convinced of it! and there *is* a treacherous intent in some quarter!"

The young maiden grew very much alarmed: but her brother hastened to reassure her, by observing, "It would be much worse, Angela, if our suspicions had not been thus excited, and if in blind confidence I were to plunge headlong into the snare, whatsoever it may be, that is set for me. The object evidently is to get me away from home during the ensuing night: hence the recommendation to be at Edenbridge by the dinner-hour—so that it is doubtless calculated I could not get back again, on discovering the deceit, until long past midnight."

"And what will you do, William?" asked Angela, still with a trepidation of anxiety, though considerably reassured by what her brother had just said.

"What shall I do?" said William, thoughtfully repeating the question thus put to him: and then for a few moments he reflected deeply. "I tell you what I will do, Angela: I will start off at once for Edenbridge, and clear up all uncertainty as to the genuineness or fabrication of the letter. If it be a forgery—as we have so much reason to suspect—I will return home at once. I can easily come back by three or four o'clock; and then aided by the advice which the Marquis will in the meantime have given me, I shall know how to act. You need be under no apprehension during my absence. Whatsoever treachery may be in contemplation, is to be reserved for the night-time. That is evident. Therefore fear not, my sweet sister. Not for an instant would I leave you unprotected, if I thought there was any danger."

Having embraced Angela, William Deveril issued forth from the villa. As he traversed the little garden in front, the old gardener, who appeared to be busy at work, stopped him with the accustomed touch of the hat; and asked him a question of a trivial nature in connexion with some shrub. William was about to hurry past, telling him that he had not time to attend to the matter at that moment,—when it struck him that the gardener surveyed him in a somewhat singular manner; and as this was not the first time that the same suspicion had occurred to our hero, he did stop and answered his questions.

"I see you are in a hurry now, sir," said the man; "or else I had several other things I wanted to speak to you about in connexion with the garden. But as I suppose you won't be more than an hour or two absent, as usual, I will wait till your return."

"You had better tell me now what you have to say," answered Deveril: "for I have some business which may detain me in town; and when I come home in the afternoon, I must be off at once to Edenbridge. I have received a letter from the Marquis of Eagledean, inviting me to dine with him this evening."

While affecting to have his eyes fixed upon the particular shrubs to which the gardener had alluded, William was all the time scrutinizing, from beneath his long dark lashes, the countenance of the old man; and his original suspicion was con-

firmed, that this individual was in some way or another connected with the treachery which was being secretly plotted—that is to say, supposing his surmise to be correct that the letter from Edenbridge was a forgery. He remained conversing with the gardener for a few minutes; and then, pretending to have forgotten something, he re-entered the villa.

"My dear Angela," he said, "I feel convinced that there is something wrong about that gardener. I have frequently told you that he has for some weeks past come much oftener than he was bound to do according to the terms of our contract for keeping the garden in order—much oftener too than the garden itself requires at this season of the year. He has lingered and loitered about at times in a manner that struck me to be strange; and with an air of good-humoured familiarity he has frequently endeavoured to get me into conversation when I have been going out, as if he sought to learn whither I was proceeding and how long I should be absent. Just now his manner struck me as more than usually peculiar. In a word, I believe him to be a spy——But fear not, Angela! Whoever our enemies may be, we will outwit them; and whatsoever may be their design, we will frustrate it."

"Do not think, William, that my fortitude will fail," responded his sister. "It is for you to adopt the course that you may think fit: I will remain here tranquilly until your return."

"You would do well, dearest Angela, not to breathe a word to the maid-servants that anything unusual has occurred. Go about your avocations with the same demeanour as heretofore. On the part of neither of us must the least evidence be shown that we suspect anything;—so that the gardener, if he be really a spy, may go and inform his employers that this morning's letter has thrown us completely off our guard."

Angela promised compliance with her brother's instructions; and he then departed. Proceeding at once to the railway station, he took the first train to Edenbridge,—reaching the Park soon after mid-day. The Marquis at once pronounced the letter to be a forgery,—thus confirming Deveril's preconceived suspicion.

"But who can have done this?" asked our young hero: "who can my enemies be? and what object can they have in view?"

"These are questions," replied the Marquis of Eagledean, gravely, and after nearly a minute's consideration, "which naturally lead us to retrospect over past occurrences, and bring events to our minds, showing us who have acted in a hostile spirit on former occasions. Alas! I fear that my graceless nephew Harold has not abandoned the career of wickedness: for I have recently received letters from Stockholm, which acquaint me that he is not in that city,—a piece of intelligence which seems to be confirmed by the fact that he has neither written to me, nor drawn for any pecuniary supplies. Yet it is difficult to conceive how he can entertain any perfidious intent with regard to your affairs."

"Good heavens!" ejaculated William; "if he were infamous enough to harbour the intent of carrying off Angela? He has seen her at the Opera: who knows but that he may have conceived a passion for her?"

"Or it may be," suggested the Marquis, "that there is something connected with that woman who has for so long a time been harboured at your abode. We know that she has some secret of the deepest importance to reveal—a secret intimately concerning yourself: but may not this secret likewise regard others, and even threaten to compromise them? If so, whatsoever hostile designs are in contemplation, may be levelled against her. It is however useless for us to waste time in conjecture: we must determine how to act."

It is not however necessary to record in this place the nature of the measures which were promptly resolved upon. Suffice it to say that a little past three o'clock in the afternoon William Deveril reached his villa near the Regent's Park. It was now verging towards the dusk, which sets in early at that season of the year; but the old gardener was still occupied with the shrubs and the plants, which certainly needed not so much care as he seemed intent on lavishing upon them. William was however careful, as he passed him by, not to show, by any change of demeanour towards the old man, that he suspected him of treachery: neither did he exhibit the haste and excitement of one who had just come from a journey. He entered the villa, and was speedily closeted with Angela. From her he learnt that scarcely had he taken his departure in the morning, when the gardener went away and did not return for an hour: but that ever since he had remained about the premises, to all appearance busily engaged. Deveril then informed his sister of all that had taken place at Edenbridge Park—how he had received the confirmation that the letter was a forgery—and how the Marquis had suggested certain measures which were to be adopted, not merely for the frustration of whatsoever treachery was being plotted, but likewise for the capture of its perpetrators.

It was now close upon four o'clock; and Deveril prepared to leave the house, as if he were on the point of proceeding to Edenbridge according to the intimation he had given to the old gardener. Angela learnt from one of the maids—who accidentally mentioned the circumstance—that the gardener was seated in the kitchen, to warm himself, as he said, after a hard and cold day's work. Angela lost no time in reporting this to her brother,—who remarked, "Yes, everything confirms my belief that he is a spy; and the circumstance of his remaining in the house is a mere pretext to enable him to watch whether I really take my departure or not. I will however do something that shall lull him still more deeply into such a belief."

Thereupon our hero descended to the kitchen premises, on some pretence or another; and when the old gardener saw him, he said, with that air of good-humoured familiarity which for some time past he had adopted, and which a person of his years might assume, "You will be late for the dinner, sir, at Edenbridge Park."

"Not so," responded William. "It is now only four: a cab will take me to the station in an hour—the train starts at five—and I shall reach my destination at half-past six. His lordship's dinner hour is seven."

Deveril then ascended to the hall—whispered a few hasty words to his sister, bidding her be of good cheer—and issued forth from the house, having a brace of pistols secured about his person.

We must now pass over a few hours, and suppose it to be about ten o'clock at night. In an up-stairs room—in a low public-house, situated in one of the worst streets in the worst part of Camden Town—four persons were assembled. These were Chiffin the Cannibal, Mat the Cadger, Spider Bill, and the old gardener. Of the first-mentioned of these worthies, it is by no means necessary to give the reader the slightest description: but of the second something may be said, inasmuch as he was a peculiar-looking person in his way. He was accustomed to dress in a sort of sporting style, but always in such shabby, greasy, sordid garments, that he might have been taken for a broken-down horse-chaunter. Sometimes he wore top-boots—sometimes gaiters—but always corduroy breeches, very loose and baggy. A fustian shooting-jacket, or else a cut-away green coat, with tarnished metal buttons, constituted the varieties of this portion of his costume: his waistcoat, which was generally of that green and yellow striped material worn by stablemen, came very far below his waist. A blue kerchief spotted with white, better known as a "bird's-eye," was loosely folded several times round his neck, the ends being crossed over the front of a shirt which did not bear too narrow a scrutiny in respect to cleanliness. This neckerchief came nearly up to his mouth so that his chin was usually buried in it altogether; and this was not merely the case in winter when it was cold, but likewise in the summer, even in the dog-days. His hat was a sort of chimney-pot shape, but having seen such good service that the crown bulged upward, thus giving a conical appearance to the article. He was of middle height —strongly built—of muscular development and compact proportions. The expression of his countenance was that of thorough determination: indeed a more daring, resolute-looking kind of a person it would be difficult to meet; and in this respect he quite equalled Chiffin the Cannibal. His eyes were dark and piercing: he had a snub nose—a very wide mouth—short ragged whiskers;—and his hair was so uneven that it appeared to have been hacked about by a pair of blunt scissors wielded by some drunken barber, the last time it was cut. He had a habit of resting his right hand upon his hip and assuming an attitude of boldest decision when engaged in conversation; and he likewise looked fixedly up with an insolent stare of defiance in the countenance of whomsoever he might wish to make an impression upon. In his earlier years he had been connected with the turf,—expending thereon the few hundreds of pounds which he inherited at the death of his father, who was a tradesman. He had then hung on, for some time, to the skirts, so to speak, of those individuals with whom his sporting proceedings had thrown him in contact: so that he was said to have "cadged" for his living —hence the surname he had acquired. Of late years however he had sunk down very low, and had turned his hand to anything desperate—had fallen amongst the vilest of associates—had become the flash man of such a disgusting woman as one of Widow Burley's daughters—and might therefore be classed amongst the foul refuse and most loathsome sweepings to be found in the great moral sewer which constitutes more than half of the modern Babylon.

As the above is no imaginary character, we have taken some little pains to describe him. In respect to Spider Bill, we need say no more than that he was so called from his peculiar shape and an extreme lanky length of limb. He also was as desperate a character as Chiffin the Cannibal or Mat the Cadger, and therefore well fitted to be their associate in any criminal undertaking.

We say it was ten o'clock; and those three villains, together with the old gardener, were drinking and smoking in the private room at the public-house where we find them thus grouped together.

"Well," said Mat the Cadger, appealing to Chiffin, "I should think it is pretty near time for us to be off. The clock down stairs has just struck ten; and it's a good twenty minutes walk towards the villa. Besides which, we must separate and go different ways."

"We will be off directly," answered Chiffin: "but don't you dictate, old feller: 'cos why, I'm in command now."

"I suppose there isn't no doubt of it's all being square and straightfor'ard this time," observed Spider Bill: "for there's been so many puts-off during I don't know how many weeks past——"

"To be sure!" growled Chiffin: "'cos why, Lord Harold is a muff in these things—and you chaps ain't much better. But here, you see, I have only been in the business two or three days, and it's going to be done as nice as possible. But I say, you feller," he added, turning to the gardener,—"you're certain sure that it's all right at the villa —eh?"

"I've told you so a dozen times," was the old man's response. "I'm certain that Deveril suspects nothing."

"But what do you think Mr. Deveril could have been about, all that while absent from home from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon?" inquired Chiffin.

"Why—courting, to be sure, down in Cavendish Square," replied the gardener; "and perhaps attending to business of some kind or another. But I'll answer for it that there's nothing wrong; because I waited in the garden, as I've told you, till he came back at three o'clock; and he spoke as friendly and looked as happy as ever. Besides, didn't I tell you that I went into the kitchen and stopped till he set off to go to Edenbridge. He came down to get his upper coat brushed, and told me he was just about to start. In a word, when I went and told Lord Harold in the forenoon that all was right, I made sure it was; and so you will find it to be."

"Well, we'll take it for granted it is so," said Chiffin. "It isn't that I'm afraid, you know," he added, with a grim look as he glanced slowly round upon his companions: "but I don't like such a thing as a failure; and as we've only got half our reward paid down, and are to have t'other half when the job's done, I want to make as sure of the last as I am of the first:"—and here he significantly tapped his pocket.

"Of course," observed Mat the Cadger, with an assenting nod.

"Then let's be off," said the Cannibal. "We don't want your services any more, old chap," he added, turning to the gardener: "so to you we say good bye."

The villains then issued forth one by one, and at intervals of a few minutes, from the public-house,—the three who were to be actively employed in the enterprise, taking different directions to gain the point of meeting, which had been already settled. This was in a narrow and dark lane at no great distance from Deveril's house; and there a covered spring-cart was waiting. The horse attached to it, was a strongly built as well as fleet animal; and a man in Lord Harold's pay was in charge of this equipage. Close by, too, Lord Harold himself was waiting. Enveloped in a rough pea-coat, and with a glazed hat, the large brims of which slouched over his countenance, he was pacing to and fro with some degree of impatience, the time for the appearance of his agents having elapsed by some minutes. At length they came one by one; and Chiffin, who was the first upon the spot, assured his lordship that it was all right, for he had been closely questioning the gardener upon the subject.

"Then let us to work at once," said the young nobleman: "because when Deveril got to Edenbridge and found out that the letter was all a trick, he would naturally take the Marquis's carriage-and-four and return home. But that would make it past eleven o'clock; and so there is plenty of time, if we are expeditious."

"But about the up-trains, my lord?" said Chiffin inquiringly.

"I took good care to ascertain," responded Harold, "that there are none which could serve his purpose so as to bring him up in time to interfere with us. Now then, you fellows, go on together: we will follow with the vehicle exactly five minutes after you leave, so that it won't have to stand long at the gate of the premises."

"Five minutes in advance will be ample," responded Chiffin. "If the inmates are in bed, we'll break into the house in a jiffy: but if they're still up it will be easier work still."

Having thus spoken, Chiffin led the way from the spot, closely followed by Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill; and in three minutes they were at the villa. The hall-lamp was still alight; and a candle was also burning in an up-stairs room—so that it was evident the inmates had *not* yet retired to rest. Chiffin's dispositions were speedily made: he was to enter by the front door, while his two companions were to effect their entry by the back part of the premises, and thus as it were take the place by storm. They were provided with black masks, which they put upon their countenances previous to commencing operations.

We will first follow Chiffin. He traversed the front garden and rang the house-bell,—having done which, he turned his back towards the door, so that the instant it should be opened the servant answering the summons, might not at the first glimpse catch sight of his mask. He was not kept long waiting: the door was opened—he made one step backward—caught the female by the throat—and kicked the door to with marvellous rapidity.

"Not a word! not a struggle!" he said, in the low hoarse whisper of his terrible voice: "or I'll throttle you!"

There was scarcely any need for this injunction, inasmuch as the young woman at once swooned with the awful terror which seized upon her.

Meanwhile Mat the Cadger and Spider Bill had leapt over the wall at the back of the premises; and stealing into the kitchen, they found the other two female servants (for the Deveril's kept three) seated at work. Mat sprang upon one—his companion on the other. The first who was thus assailed, gave vent to a slight scream—but only a slight one; for it was instantaneously stifled by the rude hand that gagged her lips:—while the other female was seized with too profound a dismay to cry out at all. They both received the hurried assurance that if they remained quiet no harm would befall them. Almost immediately afterwards footsteps were heard descending the stairs; and Chiffin appeared, bearing the inanimate form of the housemaid who had answered the door.

"Now then," he said, with growling hastiness of tone, "let us put these women into some secure nook—and then for the rest of the business. Ah! there's the coal-cellar quite handy!"—and forthwith the door of that place was opened.

The two women who had not fainted, but over whose mouths rough hands were forcibly held, showed by their looks how wild was their terror. The villains repeated their assurances that no harm would befall them if they remained quiet: but they likewise vowed that the slightest scream would be instantaneously followed by the murder of all three. They were accordingly thrust into the coal-cellar; and the bolt was drawn upon them.

"Now then for up-stairs," said Chiffin: and he led the way, followed by his two accomplices.

As there had been no light perceived in the ground-floor rooms, they did not think it worth while to enter them: but they crept up towards that where the Cannibal had seen a candle burning. Angela—who was seated there, by the bed-side of Madge Somers,—heard the footsteps; and though a tremor shot through her form, she was not so much frightened as might have been expected:—perhaps she knew that succour was near. She rose up from her chair—and the next instant the three ruffians with the black masks rushed into the room.

"Not a word, or you're dead!" ejaculated Mat the Cadger, as he caught hold of the young lady with one hand, and with the other produced a pistol from his pocket.

The sight of that weapon did strike a horrible alarm to the soul of Angela. Mat the Cadger forced her down into the chair—whipped out a cord from his pocket—and in a moment bound her arms to the back of the seat,—at the same time renewing his horrible threats. While this was doing, Chiffin and Spider Bill seized upon Madge Somers and tore her from the bed. All this was the work of a few instants; and as a shriek did now vibrate from Angela's lips, Mat the Cadger placed the muzzle of his pistol close to her fair polished brow,—declaring, with a horrible imprecation, that he would blow her brains out if she did not hold her tongue.

But at this instant there was a hasty rush of footsteps up the stairs: and the next moment William Deveril, Don Diego Christoval, the young Lord Everton, and the Marquis of Eagledean made their appearance, each presenting pistols and bidding the villains surrender. Chiffin the Cannibal

and Spider Bill dropped Madge Somers upon the carpet: but at the same instant the former was seized upon by the powerful arms of Count Christoval and hurled upon the floor—while Spider Bill was simultaneously overpowered by William Deveril. Mat the Cadger, dropping his weapon, made one rush to the casement—tore it open—and precipitated himself forth, just as Lord Everton clutched him by the skirts of his coat; so that it was a miracle the young nobleman was not dragged forth after him. The villain alighted upon a border under the window; and instantaneously picking himself up, rushed madly away. Almost immediately afterwards a vehicle might have been heard driving quickly off: for Lord Harold, who was so stationed below that he could command a view of that window, on perceiving this sudden descent and flight of Mat the Cadger, comprehended in a moment that the project had failed. He therefore hurried off the vehicle—while he himself fled precipitately in another direction, and in the wildest excitement lest the officers of justice should be upon his heels.

We must now for a few instants descend to the lower part of the premises, to announce that the captivity of the female-servants was not of long duration: for the door of the cellar was quickly opened by Francis Paton, who besought the terrified women not to give way to their alarms, nor do anything to raise the neighbourhood, as there were others in the house who would prevent any farther ruffianism on the part of the intruders. Leaving the lady's-maid and cook to recover the housemaid from her swoon, Francis sped up-stairs—where the following spectacle at once met his eyes. While young Lord Everton had quickly closed the casement again, the Marquis of Eagledean cut the cords which bound Angela to the chair; and he then hastened to assist her in lifting Madge Somers back into the bed from which she had been

so rudely torn. Just outside the threshold, Don Diego Christoval had one knee upon Chiffin's chest, a hand at his throat, and a pistol at his head; the mask had fallen from the ruffian's countenance, which wore a horrible expression of mingled rage, hate, and doggedness. Just inside that same threshold, Spider Bill was likewise upon the floor: his mask had also come off, and he looked terribly crestfallen and frightened, as William Deveril kept him down in a similar manner to that adopted by the Spanish nobleman in respect to Chiffin.

"Search this fellow, Frank!" said Don Diego; "and take from him whatsoever weapons he may have about him."

The Cannibal's pistols and clasp-knife were speedily drawn forth from his pockets by Francis Paton: while Adolphus (Lord Everton) also disarmed Spider Bill.

"Now," said the Marquis of Eagledean, who had assisted Angela to replace Madge Somers in the couch, "let these two men be conducted down stairs; and let them understand well that at the slightest attempt at resistance, they will be shot through the head. Remorseless ruffians that they are, we may not hesitate to treat them as dogs if they thus provoke us!"

Don Diego Christoval and William Deveril accordingly suffered their prisoners to rise; and the room being soon cleared, Angela remained with Madge Somers,—who, having swooned off at first, was now rapidly recovering. In dogged sullenness did Chiffin descend the stairs: while Spider Bill appealed for mercy as he was made to follow.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, in answer to the latter's entreaties: "you will hear what we have to say—and accordingly as you respond to our queries, shall we deal with you."

The parlour on the ground-floor was reached—the lamp was lighted—and the prisoners were placed in such a position that they could not possibly escape from the guardianship of those who now had them in custody. We should not however forget to observe that ere descending from the chamber above, Francis Paton had lingered behind the rest for a single moment, to exchange a warm pressure of the hand and a fond look with Angela, in congratulation of the issue of this perilous adventure.

Perhaps also, ere resuming the thread of the narrative, it may be as well to pause for a few moments and describe how it was that such speedy succour was at hand. As the reader will have seen, the Marquis entertained the suspicion that his nephew Lord Harold had some connexion with the impending treachery: for he thought he could discover traces of the young nobleman's writing in the imitation of his own hand in the forged letter. Judging from antecedent circumstances, he had come to the conclusion that if his nephew were really so connected with the plot, whatever it might be,—Lady Saxondale was also sure to be in it. It was therefore necessary to fathom the whole proceeding to the very bottom; and, still anxious to save his nephew from the ignominy of figuring in a criminal tribunal, the Marquis of Eagledean had decided upon adopting the measure of watching inside the villa, so as to not merely frustrate the intended treachery, but also capture whomsoever might be found entering the premises. That there would not be many persons whose arrival might be thus expected, was naturally judged from the circumstance that means had been taken to get William Deveril out of the way, so that only a few women would have to be dealt with. The nature of the arrangement devised by the Marquis had been duly communicated to Angela by her brother, when he returned from Edenbridge. Indeed he came up to London from the Park with the Marquis, Lord Everton, Francis Paton, and Count Christoval,—this last-mentioned personage being on a visit there at the time. Nothing however was said to the female servants at the villa,—for fear lest at the very first alarm they should be led to call out for succour notwithstanding any injunctions to the contrary, and thus prompt the expected intruders to take to a precipitate flight—thereby frustrating the hope of the Marquis to make them prisoners and fathom the entire proceeding to the bottom. It was regarded as a matter of certainty that blood would not be shed uselessly by the agents of the dark and mysterious treachery which was impending,—and that whosoever came would be contented with binding the female servants and intimidating them by threats into silence.

Such were the calculations, the motives, and the plans of the Marquis of Eagledean. We should further observe that, at about ten o'clock, Angela, who was on the watch, descended gently from the sick woman's room, while the servants were in the kitchen; and noiselessly opening the front door, she gave admittance to her brother, the Marquis, the Count, Adolphus, and Francis Paton,—who all five forthwith ensconced themselves in the breakfast-parlour leading out of the hall; and there they remained in the dark until the time for action arrived. Of what followed, the reader is already aware: the whole scheme, as arranged by the Marquis, ended in success, and without the intervention of the police—an alternative which he had been so anxious to avoid. But he did not anticipate to encounter in one of the ruffians, Chiffin the Cannibal, whom he presumed to be at the time far away across the sea, on the American soil.

We may now resume the thread of our narrative, and describe what took place between the prisoners and their captors in the parlour.

"You have been taken," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing the two prisoners, "in an attempt to carry off an unfortunate invalid woman, whom *your* knife,"—and here he fixed his eyes upon the Cannibal,—"nearly devoted to death. This is a proceeding of so extraordinary as well as outrageous a nature, that it must have had no unimportant instigation. As I have already observed, we shall deal with you according to your answers to my questions."

"And what if we confess everything?" demanded Spider Bill eagerly.

The Marquis of Eagledean did not immediately reply: his soul revolted from the idea of again letting loose the Cannibal upon society:—and yet when he reflected upon all the reasons which his daughter Elizabeth Paton had advanced against making an enemy of Chiffin at that time when he was entrapped by her stratagem at Edenbridge Park, he felt that he could not do otherwise than let the man go. But while reduced to this alternative, he made up his mind on the present occa-

sion to adopt some measure to ensure the ruffian's departure from England.

"If you confess everything," he accordingly said, in answer to Spider Bill's question, "no harm shall befall you."

"And does that apply to me, my lord?" asked Chiffin, in a sullen growling voice.

"Yes," was the response.

"Well then, here goes for confession!" exclaimed the Cannibal, with a savage exultation. "It was your lordship's own nephew, Lord Harold Staunton, which got up all this business."

"Yes—that it was!" cried Spider Bill: "and what's more, me and that man which bolted just now, have been upon the watch for I don't know how many weeks to do the job. But you, sir," turning to William Deveril, "was always in the way——"

"Ah! while I bethink me," observed our hero, "was not that gardener of mine privy to what was going on?"

"He was, sir," rejoined Spider Bill.

At this moment the door opened; and Angela made her appearance, with a singularly excited expression of countenance. She beckoned William Deveril to follow her; and the Marquis of Eagledean, thinking that something of importance had occurred, accompanied his young friend from the room; but not before he had made a sign to Count Christoval, Lord Everton, and Frank, to keep a strict guard over the prisoners.

The Marquis and William Deveril accompanied Angela into the breakfast parlour, whither she led them, and where a light was now burning. They both noticed that she still continued to manifest a considerable degree of excitement: there was a visible tremor throughout her charming form; and she flung quick as well as singular glances upon Deveril,—glances in which a certain degree of timidity and bashfulness was blended with that excitement which was inspiring her.

"What has happened, Angela?" inquired the Marquis, quickly.

"Hasten to tell us, dear sister?" exclaimed Deveril, also in acute suspense.

"Sister!"—and she echoed the word in a strange and involuntary manner: then with considerable rapidity of utterance, she went on to say, "The woman has recovered the faculty of speech. Doubtless the shock which she has sustained, produced a strong revulsion in her entire being——But no matter what may be the cause: the effect is as I tell you—and it is indeed of stupendous importance to *you*, William! It however seems to me like a dream——I am afraid my thoughts are bewildered——perhaps I heard not aright—and yet she spoke plainly—I made her repeat the words. But come you both, and hear them with your own ears, and from her own lips, that you may judge for yourselves."

Having thus spoken, Angela issued quickly from the room,—while the Marquis of Eagledean and William Deveril, exchanging rapid glances of wonderment and suspense, hastened to follow her. They both felt that they were upon the threshold of the knowledge of some grand and important secret: but neither of them could form the slightest conjecture what it might be. Still under the influence of a strange and wild excitement, Angela tripped up the stairs, and conducted William and the Marquis into the invalid's chamber. Madge Somers was now propped up with several pillows; and there was a faint hectic tinge of excitement upon the haggard hollow cheeks—or rather upon the sallow skin where the cheek-bones were prominent. Her eyes lighted up with an expression of joyous satisfaction, as she encountered the looks of William Deveril, whom she beckoned to approach close to the couch.

"Now," said Angela, her voice losing somewhat of its excitement in the gentle kindness with which she habitually spoke to the invalid,—"repeat those words which you ere now breathed twice in my ears."

"I will," responded the woman, in a faint, feeble, and almost dying tone—but still one that was clearly audible, as well as unmistakable in the syllables to which it gave utterance: then, fixing her eyes steadfastly upon our young hero, she said, "Prepare yourself to hear that solemn truth which I am about to proclaim, and which I see that Miss Deveril has not ventured to communicate——Prepare yourself, I say: for it is a truth that will startle you with the wildest amazement! You are not the brother of this amiable and excellent young lady—you are not the child of the poor wandering players——you are the son of Lady Saxondale!"

CHAPTER CLXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE.

WILD indeed was the amazement experienced by our hero at this intelligence—an amazement which was to an equal extent felt by the Marquis of Eagledean. So powerful a sensation of faintness almost immediately seized upon our hero, that he staggered back, and was compelled to lean against the wall for support. Angela, perceiving how great was the effect which the announcement had produced upon him, hastened to bear him a tumbler of water: but it was with a sort of timid bashfulness that she presented it. He drained its contents: then, observing the expression of her countenance, and instantaneously comprehending what was passing in her mind, he caught her in his arms,—exclaiming, "Oh, dearest Angela! even if all this be not a dream—if it be not a fevered fancy on the part of that poor woman—if, in a word, it be a stern and solemn truth,—you are not the less my sister! For think you that any circumstances could possibly diminish the brotherly love which I bear towards you? No—never, never, my darling Angela!"

The young lady wept profusely as she received these assurances; and the Marquis of Eagledean was likewise much affected.

"If it be a dream?" exclaimed Madge Somers, speaking in a much stronger and more excited tone than at first. "No, no—it is not a dream! Have you not the mark of a strawberry upon your shoulder?"

"Yes!" ejaculated our hero. "Here!"—and he placed his hand upon the spot.

"To be sure," continued Madge. "I saw it when you were at that cottage in Lincolnshire, at the time you so generously saved my life from the waters of the Trent."

"But that young man, then," said the Marquis of Eagledean, scarcely yet recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown,—"that young man, I say, who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale?"

"That young man," answered Madge Somers, in a solemn voice and with a corresponding expression of the countenance, "is my own son!"

Here was another subject for ineffable astonishment; and for some moments not another word was spoken: but those who were present in that room, surveyed each other with a sort of solemn awe, as if they deeply felt how mysteriously and inscrutably the ways of Providence are worked out. But at length the Marquis of Eagledean, breaking that silence, began to question Madge Somers farther. A faintness had however now come over the woman: a reaction set in from the excitement which for the last few minutes she had undergone; and she only shook her head to indicate that she was no longer able to exercise the faculty of speech.

"She must be kept quiet," suggested Angela. "I know full well how to treat her: leave her in my hands. But perhaps, dear William," continued the young lady, drawing our hero aside, and speaking in a whispering voice,—"for after the kind and considerate assurances you have given me, I shall still call you by that name—I shall still address you as a brother——"

"Oh, Angela! infinite would be my affliction," responded our hero, "if you were to treat me otherwise:"—and taking her hand, he pressed it with the most affectionate warmth. "Now continue, my dear sister—for as such you must ever be regarded by me: continue, I say, the suggestions you were about to offer."

"It is but too evident," proceeded Angela, "that this poor woman has for long years been privy to a foul wrong committed towards yourself: but she is penitent—she is anxious to make all possible amends—and it will doubtless contribute towards her mental peace, and therefore to her physical recovery, if you give her some assurance——"

"I comprehend you, dearest Angela—and I admire more than ever the noble generosity of your heart:"—then approaching the bed, our hero took the emaciated hand of the invalid, and said in a solemn voice, "Here, in the presence of her whom I love as a very dear sister—in the presence of that nobleman who has been to us both the most generous of friends—and likewise with an attesting heaven to listen to my words,—do I declare that I forgive you, my poor woman, for whatsoever wrong you may have done me!——Yes, I forgive you—and may God forgive you likewise!"

"My lord," murmured Madge Somers, now again for a few moments recovering the faculty of speech, "this generosity on your part is more than I could have expected. But as through me you have for many years been deprived of your rights, it is a satisfaction amounting to a bliss that I should be the first at length to salute you by that title which is properly and truly your's, and which the law will recognise. For as I have a soul to be saved, you are the rightful heir of Saxondale—and may heaven give you long life to bear that proud name which though desecrated in others, will be honoured in you!"

Madge Somers was again overcome by the transitory paroxysm of excitement which had enabled her to give utterance to that speech; and Angela made a sign of entreaty that our hero and the Marquis of Eagledean would now withdraw. They did so: and on descending the stairs, the former drew the Marquis into the breakfast-parlour—closing the door, so that they were alone there together.

"Now, my dear young friend," said Lord Eagledean, embracing our hero with an affection truly paternal—"let me congratulate you upon the knowledge of a momentous secret which gives you that title and that wealth from which you have been so long and so iniquitously debarred!"

"My dear lord," was the young nobleman's response, "accept my fervent gratitude for these congratulations which you proffer me; but my mind is made up to one thing:"—and he spoke in a tone expressive of the firmest resolve, while his countenance corroborated his words.

"You do not mean to tell me," cried the Marquis, more than half-suspecting what he was about to hear, "that you reject——"

"I mean, my generous friend," interrupted our hero, "that I shall continue plain and simple William Deveril. By that name therefore I beseech you to address me as heretofore: nor to those in the other room—no, not even to your own son—must be revealed that secret which we have just learnt!"

"This is madness! this is impossible!" ejaculated the Marquis vehemently: and he even spoke in anger—the first time that ever he had been angry with our hero.

"Do not reproach me, my best of friends," said the young man entreatingly, but still with an expression of firmest resolve upon his countenance. "Give me your attention—I will explain my motives for that course on which I am inflexibly determined; and your own kind heart will sympathize with my feelings."

"Proceed," said the Marquis, but with a voice and manner which showed that it would be difficult indeed to bring him over to his young friend's views.

"Has it not occurred to you," resumed the latter, "that if I profit by the information which we have just received from that woman's lips, I bring down utter ruin upon my own mother? Is it not but too evident that she—the authoress of my being—has perpetrated——I cannot speak the word!"

"The foulest of crimes!" ejaculated the Marquis, almost fiercely. "She has brought up a stranger to supplant her own offspring! Yes—there can be no doubt that you will involve her in ruin: but really, my young friend, this is a case in which you cannot stand upon such punctilios. There breathes not a man who would more earnestly inculcate the necessity of filial love, and duty, and forbearance towards a mother——but such a mother!"

"Nevertheless," added our hero, "she is *still* my mother: and not for worlds would I adopt measures which must hold her up to the scorn and the execration of the whole world——nay, more—measures that would compel the law to take cognizance of her misdeed and visit her with some terrible punishment!"

"Admirable young man!" exclaimed the Marquis of Eagledean, his better feelings bursting forth with a gush of enthusiasm that absorbed his transitory resentment and impatience, and sent forth tears from his eyes.

"Oh! I am rejoiced," exclaimed William Deveril—for such we must continue to call him, inasmuch as it was his own will to be so denominated, —"I rejoice to perceive that you at last yield to the strength of my reasoning, and that you no longer oppose the course which I am resolved to adopt."

"But will you not make your mother aware," inquired the Marquis, "that you are acquainted with the secret of your birth?"

"Yes—assuredly," answered Deveril: "because it is evident that she fears the revelation which the invalid woman has made to us——"

"And perhaps, in her desperation," added the Marquis, "when she finds that to-night's plot has so signally failed—a plot to the carrying out of which there can be no doubt she instigated my wretched nephew—she will adopt some extreme measure to take the very life of Madge Somers. Have I not now expressed the motives which influence you, when you say that you will see your mother and inform her that you are acquainted with the mystery of your birth?"

"Yes—those are the paramount motives," responded our hero. "But I am likewise desirous to relieve her mind from the terrible anxiety into which it must be plunged on account of this tremendous secret which she knows full well the woman Somers would sooner or later reveal. Moreover, you can full well comprehend, my dear Marquis, that it will be to me a source of satisfaction to tell my mother that I forgive her for all the past—to endeavour to move her to at least some little display of parental affection——"

But here Deveril suddenly stopped short and became pale as death; for the remembrance flashed to his mind, accompanied by a sickening sensation, that his own mother had at one time made to him overtures of love—a love which, had he yielded to the temptation, would have been horrible to think of!

"Let not that circumstance trouble you, my young friend," said the Marquis, in a kind and soothing manner—for he full easily penetrated what was passing in William's mind. "No—let it not trouble you more than it has heretofore done: for your mother of course knew not at the time that you were her own son——Indeed, there is no reason to believe that she knows it now; inasmuch as her measures have been taken to prevent Madge Somers from revealing to any one the secret which she—your mother—deems and hopes to be *still* a secret locked up in that woman's heart. But we must hasten back to the other room, where our prolonged absence has doubtless already created much astonishment—perhaps uneasiness."

"And your lordship," said Deveril, "will suffer those two men to depart? You will not, by invoking the aid of the law, create an inevitable exposure of all that has occurred——"

"I will suffer them to depart," answered Lord Eagledean. "Think you, William, that I would do aught inimical to your wishes? No—not for worlds!"

"And you will likewise, my generous friend," said our hero, "keep the secret——"

"From everybody!" responded the Marquis emphatically. "Yes—I will do so, because there is in my mind the deeply-seated conviction that heaven itself, in spite of your own noble forbearance, will sooner or later bring all these mysterious transactions to light; and I shall yet have to welcome you as Lord Saxondale in the presence of the world."

William shook his head slowly and solemnly, in deprecation of this prophecy; and he followed the Marquis from the room. On re-entering the opposite apartment, all eyes were at once turned upon them both: but Lord Eagledean hastened to observe that it was only in connexion with the critical position of the invalid woman they had been summoned forth by Angela,—adding that the poor creature was much better and past all danger.

"I have now to decide," he went on to observe, "upon the measures which are to be adopted in respect to you two,"—fixing his eyes upon the prisoners. "First, in regard to you," he said, now addressing himself specially to Spider Bill: "you are at liberty to depart hence. Should you encounter your accomplice who ere now saved himself by a precipitous flight—or that traitorous gardener who has been playing the part of a vile spy—you may tell them both, that for certain reasons a merciful course has been resolved upon, and that they have nothing to fear—but that it will be well for them to forbear from lightly mentioning the name of Lord Harold Staunton, their employer in the misdeed. Go—begone!"

The reader need scarcely be informed that Spider Bill lost not a moment in availing himself of the permission thus accorded; and muttering a few words of thanks, he precipitately left the house.

"With regard to you, infamous villain that you are—most unscrupulous, daring, and iniquitous of evil-doers," continued the Marquis, now addressing himself to the Cannibal, "if you had your merits, the transition would be from this apartment to a cell in Newgate. But mercy shall again be extended towards you—yet under certain conditions which I will explain in as few words as possible. I happen to have the means of ensuring your safe exit out of the country. Within the hour that is passing, a post-chaise will be ordered, and two of my companions here will take you with them to Dover—whence you will at once be embarked for France. There at least you will be in safety; and if you choose to seek Havre-de-Grace, you may embark thence for America, where you will find the remittance which some time back I made to New York on your account. Christoval, one word with you!"

The Marquis drew Don Diego into a corner of the room, and said to him in a whispering voice—"You must accompany this man to Dover. Lord Everton shall likewise go with you. Through the assistance of the Marshalls and of Edward Russell, his safe passage to the Continent can doubtless be ensured. Let measures be taken to the effect that not one farthing of money shall the wretch receive until he sets foot on the French coast. Deveril will lend him a cloak, and whatsoever other articles of apparel may help to render him a more decent object than he now is; and Frank shall issue forth at once and order a post-chaise."

The arrangements thus suggested by the Marquis, were duly carried out; and Chiffin the Cannibal took his departure in the custody—for such it really was—of Don Diego Christoval and Adolphus. We may as well observe here, that the entire plan, as laid down in respect to Chiffin, was executed; and through the agency of Ned Russell, he was safely landed at Calais. But whether he eventually got so far as the United States will be seen ere this narrative, which now draws towards a conclusion, is brought to a complete close.

Don Diego Christoval and Lord Everton having taken their departure with Chiffin the Cannibal, the Marquis of Eagledean and Francis Paton stayed at the villa to pass the night—or rather the remainder of it: for it was close upon one o'clock in the morning ere the inmates of that dwelling could think of retiring to rest. But even then, Angela Deveril would not seek her own couch. The servants had been too much alarmed and excited by the incidents of the night to render it prudent to allow either of them to sit up and attend upon Madge Somers. It should be observed that the nurse who was at first engaged to watch the invalid had within the last few days been herself very ill, and had returned to her own residence, which was at a little distance: but Angela having entertained the hope that the woman would return shortly and resume her duties, had not considered it necessary to put another in her place. Thus the absence of the nurse—which was duly reported by the old gardener—had been deemed by the conspirators one of the favourable circumstances for the execution of their plot at that particular time. Now, however, Angela missed the nurse much; for she herself was exhausted by the mental and physical excitement she had undergone: yet neither the fortitude nor the generous spirit of the young lady failed; and believing herself better capable than the servants of keeping the requisite vigil by the couch of Madge Somers, she resolved to adopt this course. It had been with considerable reluctance that William Deveril consented to her thus wearying herself by sitting up with the invalid; and he only desisted from remonstrance on receiving the assurance that another nurse should be procured early in the morning, in case the one who was formerly engaged, continued too much indisposed to resume her duties.

But our hero, the Marquis of Eagledeam, and Francis Paton had not been many minutes in their respective chambers, when Angela called forth to them, in an affrighted voice, from the invalid's room; and they quickly hurried thither. A terrible change had suddenly taken place in Madge Somers: it was evident that she was dying. Francis sped off to fetch the medical attendant: one of the female domestics was summoned to assist Angela in doing all that possibly could be done for the unfortunate woman in the extremity to which she was brought: but human succour was unavailing—consciousness had abandoned her—the glaze of death came over her eyes—the ominous rattle in the throat commenced—and a few minutes after the return of Francis Paton with the medical man, she breathed her last.

Thus did she perish. Not another syllable beyond the few explanations already recorded, fell from her lips; and the circumstances so nearly and intimately relating to William Deveril's earliest years of existence, were left still involved in a mystery which seemed to be impenetrable.

CHAPTER CLXIII.

MOTHER AND SON.

Lady Saxondale knew that the scheme for the carrying-off of Madge Somers was to be put into execution on the particular night the incidents of which we have been describing: she also knew that Lord Harold Staunton purposed to accompany Chiffin the Cannibal in the hired van, in order to bear away the woman to some distant spot, where she might be disposed of in a manner that would silence her for ever. Her ladyship did not therefore expect any communication from Lord Harold during that night—nor perhaps for a day or two, until all should be over in respect to Madge Somers. His silence and his non-appearance would be to her a sufficient indication that the plot had thoroughly succeeded, and that the woman who was so much dreaded by her need no longer be regarded as an object of terror. Therefore her ladyship had gone to rest at her usual hour,—having seen Edmund reel off to his own room in a state of complete intoxication.

But Lady Saxondale had not been half-an-hour in her own chamber, and her night toilet was scarcely completed,—indeed, her maid was still combing out the masses of that luxuriant raven hair which neither time nor the influence of strong passions and the powerful workings of her mind had streaked with a single thread of silver,—when a loud knock and ring resounded through the dwelling. Her ladyship started up with dismay—for it instantaneously struck her that the plot had failed; and then there was a perfect gush of horrifying apprehensions through her tortured brain. But quickly recovering her presence of mind, when she saw that the maid was gazing upon her in a perfect consternation, she bade her hasten down stairs and see who the visitor might be. We should observe that this maid was not Lucilla, the one who had been so frightened by the incursion of Chiffin and Lord Harold Staunton into the room which she had appropriated to herself at Saxondale Castle during the absence of her mistress: for her ladyship had left Lucilla behind in Lincolnshire, inasmuch as she had foreseen that on returning to London she would have to receive visits from Lord Harold, and she of course did not wish the young nobleman to stand the chance of encountering that maid in whose presence he could not do otherwise than look particularly foolish.

When left alone in her dressing-room, while her dependant hastened down to ascertain who had knocked and rung in so peremptory a manner, Lady Saxondale said to herself, "Some new crisis is now at hand!"—and as she glanced at the mirror opposite to which she was standing, she saw that her countenance was of a dead pallor. Then, clasping her hands in a paroxysm of mental anguish, she bitterly, bitterly repented having ever entered upon a career of crime:—in that dread moment she would have given worlds to recall the past! But she was not a woman to remain long thus overpowered by her terrors: she felt the

necessity of exerting all her strength of mind to meet whatsoever danger might now be menacing her, and to encounter with fortitude whatsoever new emergency might have arisen. Feeling convinced that the visitor must be either Lord Harold, or else some messenger from him, she threw on a morning wrapper; and scarcely had she done this, when the maid returned to the room with the expected intimation. For it was as she had forescen:—Lord Harold Staunton craved an immediate audience of her ladyship on most particular business.

"You need not wait up for me," said Lady Saxondale to the maid: and having given this injunction, she descended to the parlour into which the footman who answered the front door, had conducted Lord Harold.

The moment her ladyship entered, she perceived by the young nobleman's countenance that the plot had failed: for he was very much excited and had a bewildered look.

"You have not succeeded, Harold?" said her ladyship, in a quick trembling voice.

"No: everything has miscarried — and yet I know not how," he replied, as he threw himself upon a sofa, much exhausted; for he had run all the way from the Regent's Park to Saxondale House.

"You know not how?" ejaculated her ladyship. "But what are the circumstances? Tell me all you do know! leave me not in suspense!"

"Everything was carried out in the manner previously settled, up to a certain point. The vehicle was in readiness—the fellows entered the house — they remained there for two or three minutes—I thought it was all right—when all of a sudden the bed-room window was flung open, and out sprang one of them—a gentleman, whom I could not recognise, making a clutch at him as he thus precipitated himself from the casement."

"But the man——was he captured? was he killed? or did he escape, and tell you what had happened?"—and as Lady Saxondale put these questions in a hurried tone, her countenance exhibited all the tortures of suspense.

"He told me nothing: he sped wildly away," answered Harold; "and I, seeing that all was lost, took my own departure from the spot."

"And the other men—what became of them?"

"I cannot tell. One thing is certain, it was not Chiffin who thus made his escape. I fear therefore that he and the other agent whom we employed, were made prisoners."

"Good heavens! what is to be done?" ejaculated Lady Saxondale. "If those men have been taken captive — perhaps by the police lying in wait—they will reveal everything! they will say that they were engaged by you——"

But all in a moment Lady Saxondale experienced a relief, arising from the selfish reflection which suddenly struck her, that her name could not possibly have been mentioned in the business. At least Harold had all along promised that this secrecy should be observed, and had assured her that he had faithfully kept his pledge.

"*You*, at all events, have nothing to fear," he hastened to say, "so far as the night's work is concerned. Of course you know best how far and in what way the woman Madge Somers can compromise you, should she recover the faculty of speech——But I—what am I to do? I dare not return to my lodging—those fellows know where I lived—and if they confess who was their employer——"

"True!" observed Lady Saxondale; "it will be serious for you. You had better leave London at once——"

"To-night I can do nothing," answered Harold, with a sort of dogged determination. "I am tired to death, and unfit for any energetic proceeding. Besides, Harriet, I am not going to separate again from you. Our destinies are linked——"

"But I cannot harbour you here, Harold!" interrupted her ladyship. "It is impossible! The servants will know it——Edmund will know it——"

"They already more than suspect that you and I are not very great strangers to each other," interrupted Harold. "You would not have me go wandering forth to-night. Look at this costume—this glazed hat—this great rough coat. Do I not seem like a ruffian? how can I present myself at any hotel to ask for a bed? I may be arrested in the streets: who knows what hue and cry may be already raised after me?"

There was a mingling of entreaty and dogged determination in Staunton's looks and accents, as he thus spoke in a hurried manner. Lady Saxondale saw that it would be dangerous to provoke a quarrel with him; and she herself was getting so desperately reckless as to her own reputation, that she came to the conclusion it would be better to let him have his own way.

"Well," she accordingly said, "I must secrete you in the house as cautiously as I can. Fortunately I have dismissed my maid for the night. To-morrow we shall doubtless learn from some source or another the extent of the exposure which has taken place, and of the peril which menaces you. Then our measures can be taken. Perhaps the vortex of ruin——But no matter! it is too late to retrograde a single step. Come!"

They issued forth together from the parlour; and Lady Saxondale, opening and closing the front door, said in a loud voice, "Good night, Lord Harold!" which words were uttered in order to deceive any of the domestics who might possibly be listening to what was going on.

Staunton did not however leave the house: but with the utmost caution he followed Lady Saxondale up to her own chamber; and in the embraces of illicit passion they both forgot for a while the perils which, jointly or separately, they might have to apprehend. In the morning her ladyship told her maid, when the latter knocked at the door, that she could dispense with her services for the occasion; and thus Lord Harold's presence there remained unsuspected. His pea-coat and glazed hat were carefully locked up in a cupboard; and Lady Saxondale, watching an opportunity when no one was upon the stairs, conducted him down to the breakfast-parlour—so that when a servant entered, it might appear as if he had just arrived to pay this early visit. She was compelled to leave to chance any suspicions which might be entertained as to the real truth of the proceeding—and any inquiries which the footman might put to the hall-porter as to whether the young nobleman had indeed come that morning, or whether he had been several hours concealed beneath that roof.

Edmund remained in bed until a late hour; and it was not until Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold had finished their breakfast, that he made his appearance in the parlour. He was glad to see the young nobleman: he wanted society—and the presence of Staunton there seemed to promise a renewal of their former intimacy. He could not however prevent himself from smiling significantly at her ladyship—as much as to intimate that he understood very well upon what terms she was with Staunton: but the depraved and unprincipled young man—so deeply criminal too—was inspired by no loathing nor disgust at the thought of sitting down to table with his mother's paramour: for that she was really his mother, he of course believed, though the reader is now aware of the contrary.

It was about eleven o'clock in the forenoon, that a footman entered the parlour where they were all three seated, and informed Lady Saxondale that Mr. Deveril requested an immediate audience.

"Let him be shown to the drawing-room," replied her ladyship, without losing her self-possession: but she glanced significantly at Lord Harold, as much as to say that now the worst was likely to be known.

"Ah, William Deveril!" ejaculated Edmund, as the footman retired. "I wonder at his impudence in coming to the house——"

"Trouble yourself not with him or his concerns," said Lady Saxondale in a severe tone: and as she had regained all her empire over the ill-conditioned mind of the guilty young man, he at once held his peace.

Lord Harold followed her ladyship out into the hall—and said in a low, hurried, anxious whisper, "What do you think of Deveril's presence here?"

"I know not," she responded, her own eyes glittering with uneasiness: "but still I hope that no public exposure of last night's proceedings has taken place. If so, William Deveril would scarcely call upon me. His presence here seems indicative of a desire to save that exposure: but it is evident my name has been disagreeably mixed up in the transaction. Remain you quiet until I rejoin you."

Lord Harold returned into the parlour—while Lady Saxondale ascended to the drawing-room. She was filled with a nervous anxiety, which not all the natural strength of her mind could repress. She had not told Lord Harold the full extent of what she apprehended from Deveril's visit: her guilty soul was smitten with the horrible thought that Madge Somers had possibly revealed her secret: but if so, the reader may still understand that she was utterly unaware that William Deveril was her own son.

She proceeded to the drawing-room, assuming as well as she was able that dignified hauteur and calm stateliness of demeanour which she was wont to wear, and beneath which she was so often enabled to conceal the agitation of her soul. The moment she opened the door, she perceived Deveril standing near a window, and with his back towards her. Not that our young hero was gazing forth upon any particular object: he was looking on vacancy: for all his powers of vision were, so to speak, turned inwardly, to the contemplation of the varied emotions and thoughts that were excited in his breast. He was about to stand once more in the presence of her who had been a bitter and a remorseless enemy to him—but whom he now knew to be the authoress of his being! No marvel, then, if his soul were thus agitated: he felt that the interview about to take place was one of no ordinary character. He did not hear the door open, so absorbed was he in his meditations; and it was not until the sounds of footsteps close behind him fell upon his ear, that he turned abruptly—thus finding himself face to face with Lady Saxondale.

His countenance was exceeding pale, but inscrutable in its expression—though the dark eyes of her ladyship were instantaneously bent keenly and piercingly upon him, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether he came with an intent of resolute hostility, or whether his visit might be otherwise construed. He could not immediately speak: he knew not how to commence the explanations he had to give. At one moment he felt inclined to fling himself into the arms of Lady Saxondale, claiming her as his parent: but the next instant the harrowing reflection swept through his brain that it was possible she might repudiate him—she might disown him—she might refuse to acknowledge that claim which he had to assert. On her side, she was equally at a loss how to address him,—not knowing what his object might be, or to what extent she was once more in his power. Thus did they stand for nearly a minute, gazing upon each other in silence—a silence that was painful enough for William Deveril, and full of suspense for Lady Saxondale.

At length William Deveril felt so completely overpowered by the emotions which were working so strongly within, though their outward expression was comparatively so slight,—that he was compelled to take a seat. Indeed, it was with an air of utter mental and physical exhaustion that he sank down upon a chair. Then Lady Saxondale perceived that he was under the influence of feelings which could not be altogether of a vindictive or hostile character; and she took courage: for wherever she saw an opportunity of playing upon the sensibilities of individuals, she knew that a strong weapon was in her own hand, and that her powers of consummate dissimulation and hypocrisy would enable her to derive immense advantages from the weakness of those with whom she had to deal. She did not break the silence which prevailed: but she also took a seat—and appeared to be patiently awaiting whatsoever explanation was about to be given; while in reality she was suffering her visitor to abandon himself more and more to the influence of the sentiments which had possession of him.

"I know not how to address you," he at length said, in a voice which was tremulous and half-suffocated with his emotions. "Bear with me a few minutes! think not my conduct intentionally rude, however strange it may appear."

"Take your own time, Mr. Deveril," said Lady Saxondale, forcing herself to assume even a degree of affability. "I am well pleased that you thus seem enabled to throw aside old rancours and animosities——"

"Rancours and animosities!" echoed Deveril, with almost a wild start, as a thousand reminiscences of the past swept through his mind. "Would to heaven that they had never existed!—

LADY BESS.

would to heaven that no angry word had ever been breathed from either of us towards each other!"

"What mean you?" asked Lady Saxondale, for a moment smitten with the idea that possibly he had repented of having rejected the overture of her love at the time that it was made, and had now come to fling himself at her feet.

"What do I mean," he cried, trembling all over with the effect of his emotions; and now the tears likewise trickled down his cheeks: "how can I make the revelation? how will you receive it? Is it possible that nature has no voice on these occasions? No, no—it has not!" he quickly ejaculated: "or else——"

But he stopped suddenly short, shocked at that occurrence the recollection of which thus flashed vividly back to his mind: for he meant to have said that if nature had really such a voice, it would have spoken out at the time when that very overture of love itself was made. Lady Saxondale was bewildered by his words and his manner; and yet every fresh step which he advanced along the troubled pathway of his agitated feelings and excited emotions, gave additional relief to her soul: for she saw that he came not for the purpose of injuring her.

"Last night," he said, suddenly forcing himself to be calm, "a strange scene took place at my abode. The house was invaded by ruffians: fortunately the plot in some of its details was too clumsily managed to succeed; and precautions were taken to frustrate it."

"A plot?" said Lady Saxondale, assuming a look of surprise and interest.

"Oh! do not tell me that you were a stranger to it," cried Deveril: "let there henceforth be no deception on your part towards me! If all the past can be forgotten—as, on my soul! it is forgiven on my side—we should look each other in face with the frank confidence of other and better feelings."

"If you wish us to be friends, Mr. Deveril," said her ladyship, now smiling with the utmost amiability, "it shall be so with all my heart."

"Friends?" he ejaculated, with passionate vehemence: then suddenly resuming a degree of calmness again, he went on to observe, "But I had not finished the tale I have to tell. The plot was, as I have informed you, frustrated: it was to carry off that woman who was beneath my roof——"

"Ah! and the plotters—what became of *them*?" inquired Lady Saxondale eagerly.

"They were suffered to depart," responded Deveril. "Let me assure you at once that you have nothing to fear: no public exposure ensued—no authority of the law was invoked on the occasion! Neither do I come hither to distress you——Would to heaven that nothing had ever occurred to compel me at one time to take a hostile attitude towards you! But that woman of whom I have spoken, and who died last night——"

"Died?" ejaculated her ladyship, starting as a galvanic thrill of joy swept through her entire frame.

"Yes—she is no more," answered Deveril solemnly. "The shock killed her: but while existence still remained, she revealed a secret——"

"A secret? Ah! what did she reveal? Tell me!"—and Lady Saxondale now surveyed Deveril with breathless suspense.

"She told me," he answered, slowly and solemnly, and fixing upon her ladyship a look of so much commiseration and earnest entreaty, as well as deprecating softness, that she was more and more bewildered what to think,—"she told me that he who passes before the world as Lord Saxondale, is not your offspring—but was her own son."

"She told you this?" murmured her ladyship, in a low hoarse voice, as her countenance became deadly white. "And what else said she?"

"That your own son—he who is indebted to you for his being—he who *alone* has the right to be regarded as your lawful male offspring,—that he still lives—that he carries about with him the proof of his identity——Mother!" cried Deveril, with a sudden gush of uncontrollable feelings, "your son kneels at your feet!"

He sank upon his knees as he thus spoke: and Lady Saxondale, with a wild start, but a subdued shriek, fell back in her chair, a prey to feelings which it would be impossible to describe. The next moment however she exclaimed, "But the proof! the proof!"

"It is here!" answered Deveril, indicating the place where the mark was upon his shoulder, close up by his neck. "A strawberry—scarcely the size of sixpence——"

"Ah!" ejaculated her ladyship—and a faintness came over her: it seemed as if a tremendous consternation had suddenly fastened itself upon her soul.

"Mother," murmured Deveril, "will you not speak to me as your son?"

"My son!" she exclaimed, springing up from her seat. "What else did the woman tell you?"

"She said no more: she gave naught beyond those simple revealings—yet revealings so astounding to my ears!"

"And she furnished no other proofs? she named no one else?" demanded her ladyship, with impetuous vehemence.

"None! none!" responded Deveril, immensely excited.

"And she is dead?"

"She is dead."

"But who heard those confessions? Speak! tell me everything!"—and there was the swiftness of the hurricane in her ladyship's language, and all its excitement in her manner.

"The Marquis of Eagledean and Angela—she who had until that moment thought herself to be my sister, and was so regarded by me."

"Oh! then," cried Lady Saxondale, with bitterness, "the Marquis—who is my sworn enemy—has sent you hither to demand your rights!"

"By heaven, no!" exclaimed Deveril now springing up from his knees. "Think you that I am capable of exposing you to the world——"

"If you mean to spare me," said Lady Saxondale, "come to my arms, my dearest son!"

Deveril threw himself upon his mother's bosom, and embraced her with all the joyous, gushing, enthusiastic fervour of his noble and affectionate nature. The tears which streamed from his eyes, bedewed her cheeks; and he sobbed audibly, exclaiming in broken sentences, "Oh, my mother! you do not disown me! you do not discard me! you acknowledge me! It is all I require!"

"Sit down by me," she said, having the appearance of being deeply affected: "sit down by me—and tell me how you purpose to behave towards me—what you demand—what you expect me to do——"

"I came only to demand of you a parent's recognition of her child," responded Deveril. "You have given it—and I have no more to ask."

"And is it possible," she said, a thrill of ecstatic joy once more sweeping through her, and animating her countenance with such a light that it might well be mistaken by her son for the glow of maternal joy and pleasure in having him at length restored to her,—"and is it possible that you will consent to remain in obscurity? is it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean will not urge you to enforce your claims?"

"The Marquis of Eagledean is a generous-hearted man," interrupted Deveril; "and he has yielded to my persuasion—he has consented that I shall follow my own inclinations. Oh, my dearest mother! I feel too grateful that you have received me to your arms, to think for a moment of injuring a single hair of your head. No—not for worlds would I do it! It is hard, no doubt, that I should behold another usurping my place: but *that* is preferable to the exposure which must ensue if I assert my claims, and which would involve you in ruin!"

"Do I indeed hear aright?" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with joy. "In the same moment that I embrace a son, do I receive from his lips the most affectionate assurances!"

"I call heaven to witness the sincerity of what I say!" cried Deveril. "No, no!—much as my soul may shrink from the bare idea of living privy to an imposture, yet is it better so than to involve you in disgrace. I envy not my supplanter the proud title which he wears and the riches which must be his. My views are modest—my aspirations humble: I have more than sufficient for my wants—I am to become the husband of a charming creature whom I love—and in all this will my happiness consist. To plunge *you* into disgrace and ruin, in order that I myself should assume a lofty rank and become possessed of vast estates, would only constitute for me a gilded wretchedness, in the midst of which I should pine and languish away. Suffer me sometimes to see you—suffer me occasionally, when the eye of heaven is alone upon us, to embrace you as my mother—and I shall ask no more!"

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, flinging her arms about his neck; "instead of being grieved at the revelation of that woman's secret I am rejoiced at it, since it has given so dutiful, affectionate, and loving a son to my arms. But are you sure there will not come a moment when you will repent of this forbearance—when you will long to become possessed of your own?"

"No—never! never!" ejaculated Deveril energetically. "I would not—I could not build up the fabric of my own worldly prosperity upon your ruin and disgrace!"

"Say my death!" added Lady Saxondale emphatically; "for I could not possibly survive exposure. But tell me all the incidents of your past life: tell me everything! You must be aware that I have now the deepest interest in whatsoever concerns you."

Our hero thereupon proceeded to narrate to his mother that history which he detailed to Lady Florina Staunton, and which has been given at greater length in earlier chapters of this narrative. He told her how he had been brought up by the wandering players—how he had been taught to regard them as his parents—and how he had looked upon Angela as his sister. He described how she whom he had believed to be his mother, perished prematurely—how Mr. Deveril took him and Angela to Italy—how he died there—and how on his death-bed he uttered that incomplete sentence which had subsequently led to a search for the manager Thompson. Then he described how the Marquis of Eagledean, under the name of Mr. Gunthorpe, had proved so kind a friend to himself and Angela—how he was engaged to be married to Lady Florina—and how Angela was the betrothed of Francis Paton.

Lady Saxondale listened with the deepest interest; and throughout the narrative she frequently bestowed upon her son caressing indications of commiseration and sympathy. But when he had terminated, not one syllable of explanation did she volunteer on her own side—not a word to clear up those mysteries which Madge Somers had by her death left still unrevealed:—not the slightest detail did she give of the circumstances under which she had procured possession of that woman's child, to pass it off as her own and frustrate the hopes and aims of Ralph Farefield:—not a whisper did she breathe to account how it was that the supposititious individual should bear upon the neck a mark precisely similar to that which her real offspring himself bore. Nor did William Deveril consider it at the moment to be at all strange that Lady Saxondale should thus continue so closely reserved—so extremely guarded, on these points: his mind was too full of a variety of conflicting emotions to enable him to settle his mental gaze, from the midst of that excitement, on any one particular subject. She had embraced him as her son—she had treated him with sympathy—she lavished upon him the evidences of maternal affection: and he claimed no more at her hands!

"You must leave me now, dearest boy," she at length said: "or those who are in the house, will consider it singular that your visit lasts so long. Come to me again when you choose; and I will always contrive to see you alone, that I may fold you in my arms. But do not write to me on any consideration: letters may miscarry——"

"Mother," interrupted Deveril, "rest assured that I will do nothing to compromise you."

"Dearest boy!" she murmured, as she once more strained him in her arms: and in a few instants he took his departure.

The door closed behind him; and then Lady Saxondale's countenance became suddenly radiant with triumphant satisfaction. But it is necessary that we should afford our readers some little insight into the feelings and the motives which inspired her ladyship throughout the preceding interview, inasmuch as there was indeed but little sincerity in her demeanour towards him whom she had thus discovered to be her own real and lawful offspring. When the announcement of this fact was so suddenly made to her, and her son fell upon his knees at her feet, she was stricken with the wildest terror lest the next phase in the startling drama

should be the fullest exposure of the tremendous cheat which she had palmed upon society: but in an instant it occurred to her that if her salvation were possible, it could only be by means of a hypocritical cajolery, and therefore was it that she strained her son to her bosom. The discourse which ensued was rapid; and each successive sentence spoken by our hero, was full of hope and encouragement for that vile bad woman. She learnt that Madge Somers was dead, and that she had revealed nothing beyond the bare fact of the fraud itself in respect to her own son who passed as Edmund Saxondale, but who was really the supplanter of him who was known to the world as William Deveril. Moreover, her ladyship received the welcome intelligence that the stupendous secret was to be kept—that nothing was to be made known—that the lips of Angela and the Marquis of Eagledean were sealed—and that William himself preferred his comparative obscurity, to the attainment of rank and riches by the ruin of his mother. It was not therefore difficult for Lady Saxondale to bring herself to lavish caresses upon our hero—to press him to her bosom—to acknowledge him as her offspring—to welcome him as her son—to speak kindly and to look tenderly.

But her heart was in reality unmoved towards him: those maternal yearnings which are so natural on the part of woman, and almost so invariable, were in this instance stifled, subdued, and crushed beneath the weight of selfish considerations. Had he proclaimed an intention of demanding his rights and appealing to the tribunals, she would have ignored him as her son—she would have repudiated his claim to be considered her offspring—she would have dared him to the proof; and she would have risked everything in the desperate struggle of one last fight for the maintenance of all that she had committed so many crimes to consolidate. But he had acted otherwise—her conduct was shaped accordingly—and when he went forth from her presence, she felt herself in reality more safe and secure than for many months past she had been. No wonder therefore that a smile of satisfaction and exulting triumph appeared upon her features: for in this brief interview she had comprehended all that was grand, noble, and magnanimous on the part of her son; and she felt confident that whatsoever he had promised he would faithfully perform.

The glance which she threw over her present position was in every way reassuring and comforting for the bad heart of this unscrupulous lady. Madge Somers was dead; and she need trouble herself concerning that woman no longer. Lord Harold Staunton, being irreconcilably at variance with his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean, was altogether dependent upon her—and therefore in her power. She needed not his services to forward her aims; and she could consequently dictate to him her own terms. In this respect her resolution was taken: she would retain him as her paramour: for having become excluded from the society in which she was once wont to move, she did not intend to stand upon any scruples in the gratification of her passions. Over Edmund her dominion was likewise completely established: the crime which he had committed and the vices to which he was addicted, rendered him pliant and ductile in her hands. She had no farther fear of the Marquis of Eagledean's animosity on account of past occurrences: her son would prove her friend in that quarter. As to Dr. Ferney, she flattered herself that a little cajolery or the simulation of intensest anguish, would at any time over-ride his scruples and prove more potent than his qualms of conscience. Thus altogether, as she contemplated her present position, Lady Saxondale felt satisfied, elate, and triumphant.

CHAPTER CLXIV

THE COUNT AND COUNTESS OF TOLEDO.

UPWARDS of eight months had elapsed from the date of those incidents which we have been relating; and it was now the autumn of 1845. A glorious autumn it was too—but nowhere more glowing nor richer in nature's produce of fruits and flowers than in the southern districts of France.

In the neighbourhood of a beautiful little village, on the French side of the Eastern Pyrenees, a delightful cottage-residence was situated in the midst of a spacious and well-kept garden. There were likewise pleasure-grounds and shrubberies—an orchard—and a piece of water, on which the swans floated in graceful stateliness. In the stables attached to this dwelling, there were three or four horses; and in the coach-house a close carriage and an elegant phaeton. The occupants of this charming villa were a gentleman and lady, two male domestics, and two females. The house and premises had been to let for some time until within about a couple of months of the period of which we are now writing—when they were suddenly taken by the Count and Countess of Toledo, the gentleman and lady already alluded to. They arrived one evening with a couple of attendants—one male and one female—in a post-chaise from a northernly direction—it was believed from Paris; and they halted for a day or two at the village inn. During their walks in the neighbourhood, they perceived the villa-residence so charmingly situated in the midst of its grounds; and taking a fancy to the spot, they decided upon settling there, at least for a while. The house was to be let furnished, and belonged to the old notary of the village: a bargain was soon struck—the Count de Toledo needed to give no references, for he had something much better in the shape of a well-filled purse; and hiring the house and premises for a year certain, he paid the entire rent in advance.

It was under auspices which thus seemed particularly favourable in the eyes of the villagers, that the Count and Countess took possession of the cottage. Their domestic establishment was increased by the hire of two more servants—one male and the other female—from the village: and at some adjacent town the Count purchased the horses and carriages. They lived in good style—paid their bills regularly—and were therefore well spoken of throughout the neighbourhood. They were speedily visited by the few good families resident in that district, and thus seemed to have just as much society as could be wanted by persons for whom a somewhat retired and secluded mode of life evidently possessed the greatest charm.

The Count de Toledo was, as his title implies, a

Spaniard; and his age appeared to be about seven or eight-and-twenty. He was a fine man—but of features too coarse to be styled actually handsome; and there was a certain roughness in his manner as well as in his appearance, which, though neither positively rude nor uncouth, yet showed a deficiency of that polish which is to be acquired in the drawing-rooms of the fashionable world. But it was understood that he had served in the Spanish army, and for several years had passed his time in camps or barracks, during the civil wars between the Christinos and the Carlists. It was therefore supposed that this partial roughness of manner which characterized him, had been derived from his military life; and as his conversation was interesting, varied, and full of anecdotes,—moreover, as he was proficient in all manly sports, was exceedingly hospitable in his entertainment of the few friends who visited at the cottage, and was liberal in his dealings with the village tradesmen—living also in good style, though in that comparative seclusion,—he soon became a favourite with all who knew him. His person, if not handsome, was of a fine manly appearance: his dark hair, singularly luxuriant, curled naturally: his large black eyes were full of fire; and he had a magnificent set of teeth. His form was well set, muscular, and athletic,—powerful without being ungainly. He was a superb horseman, and managed his spirited steed with the utmost skill and expertness. But it was said that he was vain and conceited, inasmuch as he studied a certain affectation in his dress, as if he were fond of the display of a varied and extensive wardrobe,—some of his garments being of those *outré* fashions which at that time had begun to be prevalent in the French capital.

The Countess de Toledo was an English lady, and remarkably handsome. Indeed, not to make any unnecessary mystery upon this point, we may as well at once state that she was an old acquaintance of the reader's—being none other than Juliana, Lady Saxondale's elder daughter. After her adventures with the Viscount de Chateauneuf, she had precipitately left the Durands' villa, in the manner described in an earlier chapter; and retiring to some remote and obscure French town, had there lived in seclusion, as well as under a feigned name, until the time arrived when she was to become a mother. The child perished at its birth; and when perfectly convalescent, Juliana returned to Paris. She had previously ascertained that her sister and the Marquis of Villebelle, neither of whom she had any inclination to meet, were then dwelling in Naples; and she had also learnt that the Viscount and Viscountess de Chateauneuf were absent on some tour whence they were not expected to return for several months. She was therefore under no apprehension of encountering in the capital any persons whom she would rather not meet: and taking handsome apartments, she looked about her for the purpose of entrapping either a wealthy husband or a paramour.

Juliana had determined not to revisit England. She had not a sufficiency of brazen effrontery to hold her head erect and look the world in the face where her shame was well known,—as her mother had done. With Lady Saxondale she had occasionally corresponded:—that very letter which she received when the reader was first introduced to her at the Durands' villa, was from her ladyship; and it made her acquainted with the omnipotent sway which Edmund's wife had obtained over him, as well as of the mother's determination to consign him to a madhouse. Subsequent correspondence from the same quarter informed Juliana of Adelaide's death in Lincolnshire: but the young lady did not suspect that it was a foul murder instead of an accident. In her own letters to her mother, she mentioned nothing of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf: but she gave due notice of her several changes of abode—of the death of her child—and of her removal to Paris again. Lady Saxondale liked her daughter too little to be very pressing in her letters that she should return to England: on the contrary, she wrote her approval of Juliana's resolve to remain abroad, and was by no means niggard in remitting funds as often as they were asked for.

It was in Paris, on her return thither after her confinement, that Juliana fell in with the Count de Toledo, who was living in grand style at one of the most fashionable hotels. At first she considered him somewhat repulsive in his looks and uncouth in his manners: and no wonder, when she contrasted him with the delicate beauty of Francis Paton, and the exquisite gentility of the Viscount de Chateauneuf. But as their acquaintance improved, the first feelings of aversion rapidly wore off: the fine eyes and splendid teeth of the Count de Toledo were no inconsiderable saving-clauses in his favour: he was good-humoured and entertaining—liberal and frank-hearted; and Juliana saw that the conquest would be a much more easy one than that of a nobleman or gentleman of a greater drawing-room refinement. Besides, the Count in due course began to pay his addresses with an evidently honourable intention; and a marriage with a Spanish nobleman who seemed possessed of ample wealth, was a chance by no means to be discarded by a young lady in so false a position as Juliana Farefield.

When she perceived that the Count de Toledo was serious in his intentions towards her, she prudently instituted inquiries concerning him. She had in her service a French maid of exceeding shrewdness and quick intelligence; and through her she ascertained that the Count was really, as he had often informed her, a frequent visitor at the house of the Spanish Ambassador in Paris. This was sufficient to guarantee his respectability, —while his mode of life evidently indicated the possession of ample means. On her side, Juliana took good care to let the Spanish nobleman become aware that she was the daughter of Lady Saxondale, and the sister of the bearer of the same proud title: she devised a story of ill-health in England, and the advice of physicians, as the cause for her residing abroad; and she did not forget to mention that her younger sister was married to the Marquis of Villebelle, a Frenchman of high standing and at that time Minister Plenipotentiary at the Court of Naples.

Being thus mutually satisfied with each other, there was nothing to prevent a matrimonial alliance; and as the Count de Toledo was a rigid Catholic, the nuptials were solemnized in a twofold manner—first in a French Church, and immediately afterwards in the chapel of the English Embassy.

it had been arranged that after the ceremonies, the Count was to bear his bride into Spain—where they were to take up their abode on his ancestral estates in the Principality of Catalonia. They quitted Paris in a post-chaise,—the Countess attended by her maid—the Count by a valet who had been a considerable time in his service. But during the journey southward, they saw in the newspapers that there had been one of those sudden changes of Ministry which were of such frequent occurrence in Spain; and the Count was overwhelmed with affliction. It was some time before Juliana could obtain from him the revelation of the cause of that sorrow which had thus so abruptly seized upon him. At length however, by dint of caresses and entreaties, she gleaned the following explanations:—

He had originally been an officer in the Queen's service; but as his sympathies were always in favour of Don Carlos, he had passed over with a considerable portion of his regiment to that Prince's side. For this action he had been excluded from the amnesty which took place at the termination of the civil war: but he was given to understand, after a little while, that he might in all safety return to his estates, which had not been confiscated. This circumstance of the non-confiscation of his property—together with the secret intelligence forwarded to him that he might go back to his ancestral mansion—was to be ascribed to the fact that he possessed a staunch friend in one of the Ministers then in power,—though this friendship had been unavailingly exercised towards obtaining the inclusion of the Count's name in the amnesty. The Count did return to his estates, where for some period he lived unmolested: he then went to Paris, and fell in with Juliana, whom he married. Several successive Ministries had in the meantime held the reins of power; and no measure was adopted towards his own personal molestation or the seizure of his domains: he had therefore considered himself perfectly secure, and altogether justified in espousing her who had captivated his heart. But now this sudden overthrow of the last Ministry had brought into office his most implacable enemy, at whose hands everything was to be dreaded; and hence the grief with which he was overwhelmed on reading the intelligence in the newspapers.

Such was the narrative of explanations which the Count de Toledo gave Juliana: and she was naturally much chagrined at a circumstance which threatened to render her husband a proscribed exile from his country. Besides, the Count had represented his Catalan mansion and his surrounding estates in such glowing colours, that the bride was naturally desirous to be introduced to the palatial residence and the wide domains of which she had become the mistress; and therefore her disappointment and her affliction were all the more bitter. But there was something consolatory in the statements which her husband, on calmer deliberation, was enabled to make. He fortunately had still a very considerable supply of ready money at his command: he knew also that the intendant of his domains had ample funds in hand, and was a strictly honourable man—so that it would only be needful to communicate with him, in order to obtain the prompt handing over of these immediately available resources. Juliana was thus enabled to take a fairer view of their prospects than at the first glance they seemed to present; and as the journey was continued southward, she deliberated with her husband upon the course to be adopted. He suggested that they should push on to the very verge of the Pyrenees, and that their honeymoon should be passed in some quiet retreat within the French frontier, whence they might not only watch the progress of affairs in Spain, but the Count might also communicate with his intendant in Catalonia. The proposition was agreeable to Juliana—who, if compelled to remain in France at all, much preferred a comparative seclusion, where there was all the less probability of her husband hearing anything to her disadvantage: for, as the reader may suppose, she had taken good care not to inform him that she had already been the mistress of two paramours, and had likewise been a mother. They reached the little village alluded to in the opening of this chapter: the picturesque cottage, with its attached grounds, at once appeared to them a suitable residence; and as the notary to whom it belonged, would not let it for a shorter term than a year, a man of the Count's resources was not likely to hesitate at the arrangement. On the contrary, as he expressed himself to Juliana, he would only be too glad to sacrifice some little rent by being enabled to return into Spain and bear his bride to his ancestral home at an earlier period than the term for which they hired the villa-residence.

The Countess of Toledo did not love her husband in the proper meaning of the term: her's was a heart totally unfitted for a pure and virtuous affection. Whatsoever feeling she experienced at all akin to love, was one of the sense and not of the sentiment. It was intertwined with the gross cravings of her temperament; and the attachment which she bore for the Count was precisely the same which in her licentiousness she would have bestowed upon a paramour. Her feeling for Francis Paton had been of the same character—but more furious and frenetic in its devouring regards, because *he* was the first by whom her sensuousness was gratified. The Viscount de Chateauneuf she had loved much less, because her designs in respect to him were based upon a worldly-minded selfishness; and when these were disappointed, she could as readily hate and detest as ever she had liked him. The Count de Toledo was the object of her sensuous regards: she was also the more pleased with him the better she knew him, on account of his good-nature and the manliness of his spirit, which qualities invariably secure the esteem of every kind and class of women. But on the other hand, he was much attached to her. It is certain that he had espoused her not with the idea that she possessed any pecuniary means of importance; because she had not deceived him on that point: nor indeed, when estimating their immediate resources, had he for a single instant taken into calculation or made the slightest allusion to any funds which she might in case of emergency obtain from her mother. But he liked her for herself alone. She was remarkably handsome;—since her confinement her charms had expanded into a richer exuberance than even that which they before possessed; and being a creature of luxurious temperament, she was well calculated to please the fervid Spaniard. There was some-

thing, too, in the polish of her manners and the easy elegance of her deportment, which might be supposed to exercise no ordinary influence upon the rougher nature of her husband. She spoke French fluently: this was the language in which they were accustomed to converse; and being intelligent as well as accomplished, Juliana could render her discourse sparkling, winning, or fascinating, according to her purpose or her humour. Moreover, the Count was proud of his handsome English wife; and a husband's pride of the object of his choice is in itself a degree of admiration which cannot be inseparable from love.

The first two months of their residence near the little French village was happy enough: for as we have before observed, they had just sufficient society to prevent the time from hanging heavily on their hands, and for preventing their mode of existence from appearing monotonous. Juliana rode well on horseback; and she liked to accompany her husband amidst the beautiful scenery of the neighbourhood where they dwelt. They drove out too in the phaeton;—and in their close carriage they visited occasionally of an evening the few families with whom they had become acquainted. Juliana had written to her mother to mention her marriage; and Lady Saxondale was but too glad to have thus got rid of a daughter whom for some time past she had ceased to love, but towards whom she had been compelled to act with a certain degree of apparent kindness, inasmuch as Juliana was acquainted with the secret of the tremendous imposture in respect to Edmund.

It was the month of September when we introduce our reader to the cottage where the Count and Countess of Toledo are now residing. Their somewhat extravagant mode of life—the purchase of horses and carriages—and the sumptuousness of the entertainments which they gave, and which though few, were nevertheless costly in the extreme,—had by this time absorbed the greater portion of the available funds which the Count had brought with him from Paris. One day, he mentioned to his wife that it would be needful to communicate with his intendant; and as no tidings had been received of any overt measure of a hostile character being adopted towards him, either in the form of proclaimed proscription or of property confiscation, he suggested that it would be as well if he were to pay a secret and stealthy visit to his estate in order to transact personally his business with his steward. Juliana was averse to this project, inasmuch as by the mere fact of her husband's proposing to repair with so much precaution to his domain, it was sufficiently evident he feared to be arrested. He however assured her that there was little danger of such a result, as he could rely upon the fidelity of his dependants—but that being liable to hostile proceedings, he of course purposed to adopt the precautions he had named. She herself offered to undertake the journey and see the intendant: but he observed that it would look strange in the village if she were thus to absent herself while he remained at home. Then she proposed that his valet should be entrusted with the mission: but the Count objected to place so strong a temptation as a considerable sum of money in the man's hands. Thus all her objections and her propositions were overruled; and the Count himself set off on the expedition.

He remained absent for about ten days, during which interval Juliana experienced more or less uneasiness on his behalf. At the expiration of this period he returned home safe, at a late hour one night, bringing with him a certain amount of money—but by no means so large as she had been led to expect. This however he readily accounted for, by stating that the intendant had been compelled to lay out considerable sums on the repairs of the mansion when he first received the intelligence that it was to be gotten in good order for the reception of a mistress. In respect to his own peculiar position in a political sense, it remained unaltered either for the better or the worse: but it was still dangerous for him to think of returning openly to Spain, so long as his enemy continued a member of the Ministry.

It was about this time that Juliana read in one of the French newspapers that the Marquis of Villebelle had been transferred from the Neapolitan Embassy to that of Madrid, thus receiving a promotion in the diplomatic hierarchy. It farther appeared that the Marquis and Marchioness, accompanied by their suite, were about to proceed by sea from Naples to Spain, so as to avoid the circuitous route of an overland journey. As the Count frequently assured Juliana that the present Spanish Ministry could not possibly last long,—and that as the next one would most probably consist of personages more friendly disposed towards himself, he might expect to be shortly enabled to return openly to his estates,—she began to reflect that as they might possibly visit Madrid, where she would encounter her sister and brother-in-law, it was bad policy on her part to abstain from corresponding with them. She therefore wrote to Constance, acquainting her with her marriage, and highly eulogizing her husband. It happened that the Count was going into the village at the moment when Juliana had finished writing this letter; and he accordingly took it with him to put in the post. Days went by—they grew into weeks—and still no answer was returned. Nevertheless Juliana read in the newspapers that in the interval the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle had arrived in safety at Madrid, and were duly installed in the mansion of the French Embassy in that city. She fancied that her letter must have miscarried: for she thought that Constance was too generous-hearted to cherish any rancour on account of her precipitate flight from the Durands' villa after her affair with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. She accordingly wrote again; and the Count, taking charge of the letter, promised to see that the postmaster was particular in consigning it to the mail-bag. Again did days and weeks go past; and still no response came. Then Juliana could arrive at no other conclusion than that her sister was mortally offended with her; and her pride prevented her from penning a third epistle.

Christmas was now drawing near; and again were the Count's funds at a low ebb: again therefore did he resolve upon paying another stealthy visit to his estates in Catalonia on the other side of the Pyrenean boundary. On this second occasion he remained absent for a fortnight,—at the expiration of which time he returned safe and sound, and with a considerable sum of money Juliana was rejoiced at the thought that her hus-

band possessed such an honest intendant; and she more than ever longed to hasten and become the mistress of those estates which produced such ample revenues. It was on the morning after the Count de Toledo's return, that they rode out together in the phaeton. On these occasions they seldom took a domestic with them, as they preferred to be left to their own unrestrained discourse. After making a considerable circuit they were returning through the village,—when a sudden ejaculation, as if of surprised recognition, reached their ears. Glancing simultaneously in the direction whence it came, they perceived a wretched-looking man, wrapped in the rags of beggary—but such tatters as he did wear, indicating a denizen of the Catalan wilds on the other side of the Pyrenees.

"Ah!" cried the Count de Toledo, "I know the poor man! he is a labourer of my own estate——Or rather, dearest Juliana," he added tenderly, "I ought to say of *our* estate:"—then having made a gesture to the wretched object, as if to imply that he would come to his succour, the Count gave the reins to his wife, requesting her to drive slowly on; and he leapt down from the vehicle.

This little incident occurred on the outskirt of the village, and was unnoticed by any of the inhabitants.

Juliana drove on in a leisurely manner, as she had been directed, and without thinking very much of the occurrence. In a few minutes she was rejoined by her husband,—who, taking the reins from her hands, drove homeward. While proceeding thither he gave her to understand that the unfortunate labourer had wounded a soldier in a disturbance, and had been compelled to fly the country,—adding that as he (the Count) happened to have but a mere trifle of money about him at the time, he had bidden the poor man await him in the village, whither he purposed to return and give him more substantial assistance. Accordingly, on reaching the house, the Count went to the strong-box; and having taken thence what he wanted, hastened back to the village.

A month passed after this incident; and one day, on a tradesman presenting the amount of his bill, the Count de Toledo bade him return in a fortnight, at which time he would be in receipt of ample funds. The man was perfectly satisfied with the assurance, and went away. But Juliana was astonished that her husband should have thus put him off, as she imagined that there must be a considerable remnant of the large sum which he had brought back on his second visit to his Spanish domain. The Count assured her that somehow or another the money had melted away,—adding with a laugh, that he must make another journey across the Pyrenean boundary. As he treated the matter thus lightly, the Countess thought but little more of it—save and except so far as it regarded the necessity for this third separation. The Count however assured her that he incurred little or no risk; and after affectionately embracing her, he mounted his horse and took his departure.

In the evening of that very same day, Juliana was informed by her maid that a person was inquiring for the Count, and would not be satisfied with the assurance of his lordship's absence unless he saw the Countess herself. She, fancying that it might be some particular business which had brought the individual thither, desired that he should be shown into the room where she was seated: but the moment he made his appearance, she at once recognised him as that same wretched-looking object who had been relieved a month back. He was not however now clad in the same ragged style, but was very decently apparelled in a suit of broad-cloth, which but ill became his uncouth and ungainly form. He had a dissipated look; and his aspect altogether was little prepossessing. He addressed the Countess in his native Spanish tongue, of which she understood too little to comprehend him: she accordingly desired that her husband's valet, who was a Spaniard, should be sent for; and the moment the domestic entered the room, a mutual recognition took place between him and the visitor. This was of course natural enough, inasmuch as the latter had been represented as a labourer on the Count's estate, and therefore could scarcely fail of being known to the valet, who had been for some years in his lordship's service. The valet drew the man away from the room; and leading him into the garden, conversed with him there for a considerable time—at the expiration of which he took his departure. Returning to the parlour, the valet informed the Countess that the poor man, relying on his lordship's generosity, had called to solicit some farther assistance, which he (the valet) had given to the extent of his means.

A fortnight elapsed from the date of the Count's departure on this third visit to his estates; and he then re-appeared at the cottage: but his left arm was in a sling—he looked pale, ill, and haggard. Juliana was at first much terrified on his account: but he hastened to assure her that though he had sustained a somewhat serious injury, there was nothing to be profoundly alarmed at. A surgeon was at once sent for; and he substituted proper appliances for the clumsy bandages which had in the first instance been tied over the wound. Meantime the Countess had gathered from her husband's lips that he had been attacked by banditti on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees—that he had defended himself successfully against them, until some shepherds who were guarding their flocks, happened to come to his assistance, when the ruffians retreated precipitately. He had however sustained that injury in the arm: but he treated it lightly, inasmuch as he had frustrated the object of the predatory horde, and retained in safety the considerable sum of money which he had brought with him from his intendant. Juliana now told him of the visit which the labourer had paid during his absence—at which the Count at first appeared considerably annoyed: but when he learnt that the Countess was unable to comprehend him, and had transferred him over to the valet for explanations, his lordship became appeased,—treating the matter more lightly, and passing away from the subject with the observation "that the fellow deserved some blame for imposing upon good-nature."

Several weeks passed: the Count's wound was thoroughly healed—he no longer felt any bad effects from it; and as the Spring, which is early in its visits in that genial clime, was now at hand, the rides and drives were regularly resumed amidst the delightful scenery of the neighbour

hood. The garden began to put forth its richest floral beauties; and the trees, with their myriads of blossom, gave promise of a luxuriant fruitage. The sun was now powerful for many hours during the day; but the evenings were delicious. Juliana, who had occasionally felt her mode of existence somewhat gloomy and monotonous in the winter-time, was now all life and spirits once again: but she was nevertheless more or less impatient at the prolonged delay which was keeping her husband still an exile from his domain. He however was of such unvaried good-nature—so kind and affectionate towards her—so attentive—indeed almost so uxoriously solicitous to anticipate her wants and administer to her enjoyments—that she had really learned to love him as much as it was possible for such a heart as hers to love at all. She did not regret the brilliant society in which she had been wont to move in her native land ere the exposure of her shame at Saxondale Castle: she cared nothing now for the idle pomps and splendours of fashionable life: but her chief longing was to play the part of a sort of feudal

peeress at her husband's mansion in the midst of his wide domains. The Count, comprehending what thus at times was occupying her thoughts, assured her that the present Ministry could not possibly last much longer—that it had already endured for a greater period than could have been anticipated—and that its fall would no doubt prove in its results favourable to the wishes which they both so deeply entertained. Juliana made no reply to her husband's representations: in her heart she feared that he only held out these hopes in order to appease her, but in which he himself was by no means sanguine.

It was one beautiful afternoon at the end of March, that Juliana was seated by the open window of the cottage parlour, while her husband was smoking his cigar in the garden. At every turn he passed by the casement, and bent upon her a fond look, at the same time bestowing some kind word. Having finished his cigar, he approached the house for the purpose of entering—but again lingered in front of the window to make some passing remark. By one of those movements which have no particular meaning, he took off his hat as he stood near the casement; and so powerful was the glow of the sun that it made his hair, which was of a dark colour, seem absolutely light in the golden beams which poured their effulgence upon his head. Juliana was just on the point of admonishing him not to expose himself too much to the fervid heat of the unclouded sun,—when she noticed that he dropped his hat with a sudden start, and as if all in an instant thrown into some degree of excitement or confusion. But as quickly recovering his self-possession, he said to his wife, "I will rejoin you, dearest, in a few moments:"—and then hastened away towards the farther extremity of the garden.

Juliana thought there was something singular in this proceeding; and she at once issued from the cottage. On emerging into the garden, she beheld her husband entering the orchard, in company with a man whom she recognised as that labourer who on two previous occasions had sought relief. A gloom came over her countenance: she liked not the aspect of these circumstances; and from the shade of some trees, she watched her husband and that individual as they passed slowly along in the orchard. She saw them stop short, and both gesticulated violently; so that she now wondered that the man should have the impertinence to assume so threatening an attitude in the presence of the Count. A suspicion that there was something more in the repeated visits of this person than she had hitherto been led to believe, entered her mind; and this gave rise to other reflections, which were by no means calculated to relieve her from anxiety.

Still she kept her eyes fixed upon her husband and his companion: but as she suddenly beheld them separate—the man remaining where he was, and the Count retracing his way rapidly towards the dwelling—she sped back thither before he had an opportunity of seeing that she had issued forth at all. Resuming her seat in the parlour, she awaited the Count's entrance,—composing her features as well as she was able, and wondering whether he would tell her what had taken place. He entered the cottage in a few minutes; but instead of rejoining her in the parlour, went straight up to the bed-chamber where the cash-box was kept. She at once surmised that it was to procure fresh means of relief for the man who thus appeared to have such strong claims on her husband's bounty. He did not remain many moments upstairs; and on descending, just looked into the parlour to inform his wife that he would be with her in a few minutes. He then sallied forth again; and Juliana, haunted by suspicions which grew stronger and stronger, though they were still utterly vague and indefinite, hastened up to the bed-room. The Count, in his hurry, had forgotten to lock the strong-box, of which he was invariably accustomed to keep the key; and as Juliana had penetrated at this time to know exactly what amount there ought to be in the casket, she was speedily enabled to estimate how much had just been taken thence. To her surprise and annoyance, as well as with a still strengthening suspicion, she discovered that a very formidable inroad indeed had been made upon their pecuniary resources, so that there was scarcely sufficient left to meet the tradesmen's bills that would be coming in at the end of the week. She descended again to the parlour,—sadly troubled, but still utterly at a loss to conceive how it was possible that a mere labourer on her husband's estate could have obtained such a hold on his lordship as thus to extort from him so large a pecuniary succour. She now felt assured that on the occasion when the contents of the cash-box had so mysteriously diminished, necessitating at the time a repetition of the Count's visit to his intendant,—the assistance he had afforded the poor man must have been to a far greater amount than he had represented, and that thereby the exhaustion of their funds was to be accounted for. All these things agitated, bewildered, and perplexed the mind of Juliana: but in the midst of her troubled reflections, the Count entered the room. He at once, with his wonted frankness, informed her that the man who was succoured on previous occasions, had called again to implore farther bounties.

"As you may easily suppose," his lordship went on to say, "I was little gratified by this renewal of his importunities; but as he solemnly assured me that he had now a chance of benefiting himself permanently, if he had only a sum of ready money, I agreed to help him for the last time."

"And to what amount did you thus assist him?" inquired Juliana, not suffering her husband to perceive that the incident had at all troubled her.

"I am afraid I have been rather foolish," responded the nobleman, with a good-natured laugh: "for I have given the fellow a sum sufficient to make a gentleman of him."

"But how is it possible," asked Juliana, still with a perfectly ingenuous air, "that a poor labouring man should need such ample supplies—and that you should consent thus to minister to his wanton extravagances?"

It struck Juliana that the Count eyed her strangely for a moment—with a keenness as if to penetrate into the depths of her soul, and ascertain whether she had any deeper motive than mere passing curiosity for putting these questions. She maintained her countenance perfectly: the reader knows she was a perfect mistress of dissimulation; and she did not choose to let her husband perceive that she had been smitten with any disagreeable

impression; for if so, he would at once suspect that she had watched his movements. Therefore, when he saw nothing in her features to betray what was passing in her mind, he suddenly desisted from that keenness of gaze,—and observed in his wonted off-hand frank way, "The fellow belongs to a family that has been long located on my domain. Since he has been in France, he has fallen, I fear, into bad company: but he is now repentant, and purposes to lead a steady life. So I have given him this last chance—and at all events have bade him come into my presence no more."

The discourse was then turned into another channel; and Juliana knew not what to think. She could not altogether banish the disagreeable impression made upon her mind, nor the vague suspicions that something was wrong, which had been excited in her bosom: but still her husband's explanations had been given with a frankness which seemed perfectly sincere; and so far as she could perceive, he had not practised any deception towards her. But a circumstance which she had foreseen now happened in the course of a day or two: this was that the Count informed her of his intention to undertake another journey across the Pyrenees.

"This time," she at once said, "you must permit me to accompany you? If there be dangers, I will share them."

"And it is for this very reason, dearest, that you must *not* accompany me," was his immediate response, accompanied by caressing manifestations of affection.

"I beseech you," persisted Juliana, "to let me go with you on the present occasion. Besides, I long to see the place which sooner or later will be our home. I have hitherto concealed, if not altogether subdued, my impatience——"

"And you must continue to do so for a short space longer," interrupted her husband. "You cannot accompany me now, my dearest wife: it would perhaps seriously compromise my safety. I expect to receive some tidings of a nature favourable to our hopes, and trust that in a very short time there will no longer be any necessity for stealthy visits to my ancestral home."

"Promise me, then—promise me faithfully," said Juliana, "that if circumstances should compel you to pay another stealthy visit, after this one, to your estates, you will suffer me to accompany you."

"I promise faithfully," responded her husband: and having embraced her, he once again took his departure on horseback—but unattended and alone.

CHAPTER CLXV.

THE MEETING.

For the first few days after they had thus separated, Juliana continued much troubled in her mind. Sometimes she was dull and desponding—haunted by vague suspicions—a prey to indefinite fears: at other times she was excited, impatient, and angry,—thinking that she had not acted with proper spirit in forbearing from questioning her husband further relative to the man whose frequent extortions compelled him to visit his intendant oftener than he otherwise would have done. And now, too, she began to reflect that these repeated absences might have been very well avoided, if the intendant himself came periodically across the Pyrenean boundary to bring the requisite supplies,—which course, indeed, seemed much more natural on the part of that functionary, rather than suffer his master to endanger his own safety by running after him. She wondered that this had not struck her before. Suspicion is terribly prolific: it engenders a thousand;—and such was the case in the present instance. Juliana began to calculate that though they lived well, and even handsomely, yet their expenditure must be wretchedly insignificant in comparison with the lordly revenues produced by her husband's estates: that is to say, if they were of the magnitude which he had represented. The thought would steal into her head that in some way or another she had been deceived: but this was an idea too frightful to harbour willingly. She endeavoured to banish it altogether; but she could not. In her attempt to escape from it, she sought excitement in other ways. She paid a round of visits—she invited guests to the cottage—she rode out frequently—she took long walks. Still that idea haunted her. Yet, how could she have been deceived? Not in respect to her husband's rank and station: for had not her maid ascertained in Paris that he was all he had represented himself? But perhaps it was in the extent of his pecuniary resources that he had misled her: or perhaps his estates were really confiscated, and he had not liked to reveal the distressing truth—so that the resources which he represented as coming from his intendant, might be in reality furnished by the purse of private friendship? At all events she resolved to lead him into the fullest explanations on his return: for now that her suspicions were once excited, she could not possibly endure a state of uncertainty and suspense.

A week had elapsed from the date of the Count de Toledo's departure on this last occasion,—when one day, as Juliana was riding in the phaeton through the village, the groom driving her, she was struck with astonishment on beholding M. Durand standing at the door of the inn. She liked this encounter as little as possible; inasmuch as the Durands knew full well, when she was staying at their villa at Auteuil, that she was in a way to become a mother; and they were likewise perfectly cognizant of her amour with the Viscount de Chateauneuf. If a word were breathed in the village of those circumstances, her reputation would be ruined—the tale would inevitably reach her husband's ears—and she would be dishonoured in his eyes. M. Durand had at once recognised her, so that she was compelled to order the phaeton to stop. Hastily alighting, she ran forward as if to welcome him with enthusiasm—but in reality to prevent him from addressing her by the name of Madame Chesterfield (as she had been called at the villa) in the presence of the groom. She shook him by the hand; and inquired with much seeming friendship after his wife: M. Durand led her into a parlour in the hostelry; and there she found Madame Durand herself. It appeared that a brother of the old gentleman's had recently died at Barcelona; and as he had no children, M. Durand

was his heir. He had been established for a long series of years as a merchant in the Catalan capital, and had amassed a considerable fortune. On the strength of this rich heritage, Monsieur and Madame Durand were travelling post from Paris, and had diverged several miles from their more direct route, in order to pay a flying visit to some distant relations who dwelt in those parts. On their name being mentioned, Juliana discovered—much to her apprehension and annoyance—that they were one of the families whom she was accustomed to visit.

She now had to give explanations on her own side; and these were to a certain extent humiliating enough. She was obliged to confess that the name of Chesterfield was a feigned one—that the story of a husband in India was altogether an invention—that she had never been married at the time she was at the Durands' villa—and that she was in reality the daughter of an English peeress named Saxondale. She went on to inform the Durands that she was now married to the Count de Toledo, a Spanish nobleman who for political reasons was unable to enter Spain; and that for some time past they had resided in the neighbourhood of that village. She begged and implored Monsieur and Madame Durand to save her reputation; and as we have before stated that this worthy couple were by no means over nice in their notions of female morality, they readily promised to follow her injunctions. She lavished upon them all possible proofs of gratitude and friendship; and insisted that they should dine with her: but they had just partaken of luncheon at the hotel, and they were in haste to continue their journey. Indeed, their post-chaise was now in readiness; and they took their leave of the Countess de Toledo, to pursue their way,—their purpose being to enter Spain by way of Perpignan at the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees.

Juliana was much relieved when she saw them take their departure: but she now more than ever longed to quit France altogether, and fix her abode on her husband's domain; for she calculated that in the depths of Catalonia there was far less chance of incurring such disagreeable encounters as this one, than on the northern side of the Pyrenees. She therefore looked anxiously forward for the Count's return, not merely that she might have the fullest explanations with him on the various points which troubled her—but likewise because he had given her to understand he expected some favourable intelligence with regard to his own political position, on the occasion of this visit into Spain. Ten days more passed. The Count had been absent above a fortnight; and his prolonged absence rendered Juliana more and more uneasy and restless. But now another incident occurred which requires special mention.

It was late one evening—and just as Juliana was about to retire for the night—that the sounds of an equipage dashing rapidly along the main road, which skirted the front of the garden, reached her ears. There was in this nothing extraordinary, inasmuch as it was one of the routes from Perpignan to Paris; and therefore the passage of vehicles was by no means unfrequent. But scarcely had this equipage reached the border of the grounds attached to the cottage, when a tremendous crash was heard by all the inmates of the dwelling. They rushed forth: the horses were plunging—the postilions were shouting and swearing—and the vehicle itself, which was a handsome travelling-carriage, lay upset in the middle of the road. A valet and lady's-maid who had been riding in the rumble behind, were precipitated from their places: fortunately, however, they had fallen upon a bank of long grass by the road-side, and were therefore little hurt. But what was the astonishment—and for a moment what the dismay of Juliana—when, as she hurried forth from the cottage with her domestics, to render assistance, she recognised in that lady's-maid the faithful Mary-Anne, the dependant of her sister Constance.

It was a beautiful night; and the heavens were studded with stars. Scarcely therefore had Juliana reached the garden-gate, when she made this recognition, as the valet—a smart Frenchman—was supporting Mary-Anne in his arms, and questioning her in broken English, as well as with much anxiety of mind, whether she were hurt. A glance from the lady's-maid to the carriage, showed Juliana the form of the Marquis of Villebelle, who had just emerged from the upset vehicle, and was drawing Constance forth. Juliana hastened to make herself known to the Marquis; and the next moment she was clasped fondly and fervently in the arms of her sister Constance, who had escaped without the slightest injury from the accident. As infinite as was the joy, so great was evidently the astonishment likewise of Constance in thus encountering her sister; and a rapid interchange of observations made the Marquis and Marchioness aware, on the one hand, that Juliana was married to the Count de Toledo—and informed Juliana herself, on the other hand, that the letters she had written to her sister had never reached their destination.

One of the axletrees of the carriage was broken; and though it might be sufficiently repaired with a cord and a bar of wood, to enable the horses to drag it into the village, the vehicle was totally unfit for the reception of the travellers. Juliana therefore begged that the Marquis and her sister would take up their quarters at the cottage; and this invitation was gladly accepted by the fond and kind-hearted Constance—while the Marquis had no objection to offer; for the intelligence that his sister-in-law was now a married woman, naturally led him to believe and hope that she was at length respectably settled in life. We should here observe that when Mary-Anne perceived a lady folded in the arms of the Marchioness, and in that lady quickly recognised Juliana, she was herself seized with astonishment. Juliana lost no time in saying something kind to her sister's faithful dependant, who was still more surprised on being informed of the lady's marriage. The whole scene was therefore one of considerable excitement, and of no mean interest for several of the persons who figured in it.

The Marquis directed that the valet and the maid should follow the carriage to the village-inn, and take up their quarters there: for a glance at the cottage, showed him that its dimensions would not afford accommodation for too large a company. He and the Marchioness then followed Juliana into the dwelling; and while the table was being spread with materials for supper, the two sisters again embraced each other. Indeed, Constance

was overjoyed at this unexpected but most welcome meeting with one on whose account she had suffered much anxiety for a long time past; and infinite was her pleasure to learn that Juliana had made a match of which she spoke with so much pride and satisfaction. But where was her husband? In the first excitement of the encounter, Juliana had forgotten to inform her sister and brother-in-law that the Count de Toledo was absent on a visit to his estates in Catalonia. One explanation led on to another; and Juliana gave a description of the political position of her husband. The Marquis of Villebelle listened with something more than attention: his countenance gradually wore a singular aspect; and in an involuntary manner, he exclaimed, "It is remarkable that, much as I know of Spain and Spanish affairs, I never heard till now, Juliana, of the nobleman whom you have espoused."

Juliana gazed with an uncontrollable sensation of affright and horrified dismay upon her brother-in-law, as he gave utterance to those words. All her suspicions—hitherto so vague and indefinite—flamed up again in her mind, but with a brighter intelligence: so that she was smitten with the awful thought that, after all, her husband was an impostor. Constance caught her by the hand,—exclaiming, "Juliana dearest, what in heaven's name is the matter? I am sure Etienne did not purpose to wound your feelings."

"Far—very far from it," said the Marquis quickly. "It is not a reason that there should be no such nobleman, because I have never heard of him. I *may* have even heard of him—and yet have forgotten it. My words were inconsiderate and unguarded. Titles are most plentiful in Spain; and it is impossible for any one man's head to retain the recollection of them all. Pray pardon me, Juliana!"

"Say no more upon the subject," interrupted his sister-in-law, considerably relieved by all that he had just said, and angry with herself that she should so suddenly have yielded to those wild fears and terrific apprehensions.

"I have an adventure to relate to you, Juliana," said Constance, thus seeking to turn the conversation into another channel. "Yes—it was an adventure quite romantic in its way, I can assure you—though by no means agreeable for many reasons. The fright and the loss——"

"What, then, was this adventure?" inquired Juliana, whose interest and curiosity were now excited by her sister's words.

"An adventure with banditti," resumed Constance. "It happened yesterday, in the broad daylight. We were travelling through the north-eastern part of Catalonia, and in a wild desolate district,—when all of a sudden the carriage was surrounded by at least a dozen men, armed to the teeth."

"Heavens, what an adventure!" ejaculated Juliana, shuddering with affright.

"But I can assure you," said the Marquis, "that your sister bore herself with the utmost fortitude. As you may suppose, resistance was entirely vain, as it would also have been perilous against such a horde of desperadoes. The consequence was that as they experienced no opposition, they behaved courteously enough."

"You have forgotten one little circumstance, dear Etienne," said Constance; "and you are not exactly representing the facts as they positively occurred. For, the moment the carriage was stopped, you seized your pistols, and gave the men to understand that you would use them. But I besought you not to endanger your life thus madly——"

"And I was compelled to submit," added the Marquis, smiling. "Well, perhaps it was all for the best: for, as I have said, resistance would indeed have proved utterly vain. The captain of the band—who was certainly the most decent fellow for a bandit that ever figured otherwise than on a stage in a melodrama—came up to the carriage-window, and in very excellent French assured us that not the slightest violence should be offered us if we only remained quiet. He even went so far as to say that our articles of jewellery should be left us, and that our domestics should not be despoiled at all, if we only gave up whatsoever ready money we had in our possession. Now, it unfortunately happened that there was a casket in the carriage, containing about twenty thousand francs in gold and silver——"

"Eight hundred pounds sterling," observed Constance; "and the whole of this sum did the brigands self-appropriate,—leaving us however the little we happened to have in our purses, and faithfully fulfilling their pledge in respect to our jewellery, as well as the property of the servants. They did not even ransack our trunks and boxes—but appeared perfectly well content with the rich booty in the shape of specie that fell into their hands."

"And well they might be!" ejaculated the Marquis. "But I rather think that their great forbearance was not altogether owing to good feeling on their part—but may be also ascribed to terror lest one of the flying columns which the Captain-General of Catalonia has sent out to sweep the Principality of the banditti who infest it, should have suddenly appeared upon the spot. Hence the expeditious mode with which the scoundrels transacted their business. They decamped with their booty; and when we reached the next village, we were informed that there was little doubt our plunderers were a gang which for some years have carried on their proceedings with comparative impunity, and seem to defy all the vigilance of the authorities. Their commander is known as Ramon de Collantes: and though an immense sum is set upon his head, yet his comrades are evidently too faithful to betray him."

"This was indeed a romantic but a frightful adventure!" exclaimed Juliana; "and I congratulate you both upon having passed through it on terms so comparatively cheap."

The conversation was continued until a late hour,—when the Marquis and Constance were conducted to the chamber prepared for their reception; and Juliana retired to her own. She could not however immediately close her eyes in sleep: the remarks which had fallen from the lips of her brother-in-law in respect to her husband, continued to haunt her; and though she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with a review of the observations which he had subsequently made to qualify the effect of the first, she could not shake off a certain uneasy feeling. When slumber at length visited her, that feeling still pursued her and raised up all kinds of images of terror to

people her dreams. The night which she thus passed was restless, troubled, and disturbed; and when she awoke in the morning, it was with an aching head and careworn looks.

The Marquis of Villebelle rose at a somewhat early hour, and descended to walk in the garden before breakfast. Juliana saw him from the window of her own bed-chamber, thus sauntering along the gravel-walks and amusing himself with the contemplation of the floral beauties profusely scattered about. She caught herself sighing as she envied the lot of her sister, who was married to a nobleman that lay under no political ban—who in a very short time had pushed himself up, by his own merits and talents, from complete obscurity to a high diplomatic position—and whose personal appearance was infinitely superior to that of her own husband the Count de Toledo.

While she was thus giving way to her reflections, and performing her toilet, she heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs approaching along the road; and again hastening to the window, she in a few moments perceived that it was her husband. She waved her kerchief in token of welcome; and he answered the salutation in a similar manner. At that instant she caught sight of Villebelle, who was in the front garden; and she noticed that he flung rapid glances from the horseman who had stopped at the gate, up to the window where she was thus waving her kerchief. Then the Marquis advanced hurriedly towards that gate, just as the Count de Toledo alighted; and it struck Juliana, as well as she could judge from the distance of about twenty yards, that there was a startling recognition between her brother-in-law and her husband. Was it possible they had met before, and that the Marquis could have forgotten the Count's name? or had the Count borne some other denomination when they had thus previously encountered each other? Juliana remained at the window gazing forth; the Marquis and her husband stood conversing for a few moments; and while the groom hastened forth to take charge of the horse, they walked away together along one of the shady avenues in the garden. Assuredly, thought Juliana to herself, they must have met before; and now they were probably conversing on past occurrences familiar to them both. But she nevertheless considered it strange and unkind that her husband did not at once come up to embrace her.

In a few more minutes the Marquis and the Count emerged from the shady avenue, and approached the cottage. They entered together: Juliana heard them both ascend the stairs: the Marquis passed into the chamber which himself and Constance had occupied,—the Count entering that where Juliana was dressing. He clasped her in his arms, and seemed more fervid than ever in the caresses which he bestowed upon her. When these endearments were over, and she had leisure to contemplate him, she was struck with his pallid and careworn looks: but he hastened to assure her that he had ridden throughout the whole of the past night in order to rejoin her again as soon as possible. Then he renewed his caresses, and appeared so happy in their reunion that she could not at once begin to question him on those various points concerning which she had made up her mind to solicit the most candid as well as the completest explanations.

"And so accident has thrown your brother-in-law and sister in your way?" said the Count. "The Marquis and I have met before. It was some time back—in my father's life-time—and ere I succeeded to my title."

This explanation, given in her husband's wonted off-hand manner, produced an indescribable relief in Juliana's mind. She saw at once that he was all he had represented himself to be: or else Villebelle could not ere now have recognised him as such;—for that he had done so, she naturally inferred from the fact of their walking and conversing together; and moreover her husband would not give her an assurance which the Marquis could presently disprove.

"By the bye," continued the Count, "your brother-in-law has been telling me of his adventure in Catalonia——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a recollection struck her: "perhaps it was the terrible Ramon de Collantes and his formidable band who waylaid you on that occasion when you were wounded?"

"Very probable," answered the Count. "But hasten and finish your toilet, dearest Juliana: for the Marquis and Marchioness purpose to take their leave immediately after breakfast. I myself—to speak candidly—am so exhausted with my night's travel, that I shall lie down and take a little repose. If I see not his lordship again ere his departure, pray make my best excuses."

Juliana descended to the parlour where the breakfast-table was spread, and where she found the Marquis and Marchioness awaiting her presence. Constance at once threw herself into her sister's arms; and Juliana was for a moment surprised at the effusion of grief which convulsed the Marchioness. She wept and sobbed bitterly: but Juliana thought to herself that it was quite a natural outpouring of Constance's affectionate disposition at the idea of so speedy a separation after being so brief a space together. Presently the Marchioness grew more composed: but she looked very pale, and even ill—and seemed much desponding. The Marquis himself had a certain air of restraint which he endeavoured to shake off: but he could not. Juliana's keen glance and wide experience of human nature convinced her that there was something on his mind; and now she likewise coupled the grief of Constance with this suspicion. She herself grew restless and uneasy; and there was a sort of vague terror hanging upon her soul.

"You knew my husband before?" she said to the Marquis: and the very words she thus uttered, seemed to her imagination to connect themselves with all the undefined apprehensions that were uppermost in her thoughts.

"Yes: we have met before," responded the Marquis.

"And he was not then the Count of Toledo?" said Juliana.

"He was not then the Count of Toledo," answered the Marquis, repeating her words in a manner which struck her as still more singular than even his constrained air had previously done.

"There is something strange about you, Etienne!" she exclaimed, unable to control her feelings; "and something strange about you likewise, Constance!"

"Constance," the Marquis hastened to observe,

"is afflicted at the idea of parting from you so soon."

Juliana gazed very hard at her sister to see if the looks of the latter corroborated this assertion; and the Marchioness murmured, "Yes, dearest Juliana, believe me—Oh, believe me! it well nigh breaks my heart to separate from you thus."

"My husband," Juliana went on to observe, "regrets that excessive fatigue should have so absolutely prostrated him as to prevent him doing the honours of the breakfast-table:"—but as she thus delivered herself of the excuse with which she had been charged, it struck her that the very apology itself was insufficient to account for the absence of the Count from his proper place when hospitality was to be shown to those who had become connected with him by marriage: for she now thought that he might have borne up at least another hour against his sense of weariness, however excessive it might be.

"Now, dearest Constance," said the Marquis, "hasten and get ready to depart. The carriage is doubtless repaired by this time; and we must pursue our journey towards Paris without delay."

"But, Ah!" ejaculated Juliana, as a sudden recollection struck her: "you are without funds—you were plundered of them. Doubtless the Count has ample resources with him: I will procure you a supply——"

Constance hurried from the room: but ere the door closed behind her, Juliana's ear caught a half-smothered convulsing sob; while the Marquis, expressing his thanks for the proposal she had just made, went on to observe, "It is not necessary to avail ourselves of your kindness: for at the first large town which we reach, any banker there will cash my draft upon Paris."

"Now, tell me, Etienne," said Juliana, looking earnestly in her brother-in-law's countenance; "is there anything weighing upon my sister's mind, and weighing upon your's also? But Ah! methinks I understand," she ejaculated, with a sudden access of bitterness in her tone, as a thought smote her brain. "You know my husband to be a man of the highest honour and the strictest probity—you know likewise that in becoming his wife, I must have deceived him in respect to my own antecedents: you have recognised in him a friend of former times—and you feel shocked that he should have been thus deceived! Oh, do not deny it! I now comprehend it all! And my sister—she trembles lest the Count should discover my past frailties, and that he should wreak upon me a terrible Spanish vengeance. Tell me, is it not so?"

"Juliana," responded Villebelle, addressing her in a solemn tone, "it is painful—most painful thus to refer to the past. I beseech you to dwell no longer upon it. But one word more ere we separate. If, Juliana, you should ever require the succour or the consolation of friends, rest assured that you will not apply in vain to your sister or myself. Unfortunately your husband is indeed proscribed——"

"Ah!—and his estates are all confiscated?" ejaculated Juliana. "I have feared so for some time past: but through kindness he has forborne from revealing the sad, sad truth!"

"Believe me, Juliana," continued the Marquis, gravely and earnestly, "your husband is proscribed beyond all hope of ever having the ban lifted from off his head. Every time that he crosses the Pyrenean frontier he risks his life——I am compelled to speak plainly—he incurs the chance of being shot summarily, or dragged ignominiously up to the scaffold's platform!"

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana, clasping her hands in despair: "are his persecutors so rancorous? But," she ejaculated, catching at the slightest gleam of hope, "may not a change of Ministry——"

"No change of Ministry can benefit him," responded Villebelle. "It is my duty, painful though it be, to assure you that he is proscribed beyond redemption. He has solemnly promised me, during the few minutes we ere now conversed together, that he will remain altogether in France. If you wish to preserve your husband to yourself, you will add the weight of your influence to induce him to keep this pledge. I understand he has brought ample funds away with him from Catalonia on this occasion——"

"Doubtless from a friendly source?" ejaculated Juliana inquiringly.

"Yes: from a source where reimbursement never will be demanded," responded Villebelle. "But let him leave this neighbourhood. While on the Pyrenean frontier, there will ever be a temptation to induce him to cross it. Urge him, Juliana, to remove farther into the interior of France: tell him that for the sake of his life you yourself voluntarily and cheerfully renounce every hope of accompanying him into Spain; and persuade him to turn his attention to some pursuit by which he may earn his livelihood in this country. Do you promise me to follow this advice? do you pledge yourself to make sacrifices for the sake of him who has become your husband?"

"Is his position, then, really so hopeless?" inquired Juliana, with a sickening sensation at the heart, as all her fine dreams of enacting the feudal peeress in a castellated mansion on a Catalan domain, seemed to dissipate like the mists of morning when the sun is up.

"It is hopeless!" answered Villebelle. "Painful——nay, even more—torturing to me though it is, to be thus compelled to speak such truths, every one of which must penetrate like a dagger into your heart, it is nevertheless my duty as your brother-in-law, and for your sister's sake, to speak thus openly. Now, fail not, Juliana, to follow the counsel which I so earnestly and so disinterestedly give you!"

"I will, Etienne," she answered—but it was almost in a dying tone: for though now utterly relieved from her first apprehensions that she had married an impostor, she yet had the frightful conviction forced upon her that her husband was a proscribed outlaw, and a pauper dependent upon the bounties of friendship.

At this moment the Marchioness of Villebelle returned to the room; and the Marquis hastened to say to her, "Constance dearest, I have told Juliana all that it was agreed between you and me that I should tell her. She has faithfully pledged herself to follow my advice; and I therefore conjure you to control your own feelings as much as possible, so that the parting moments need not be unnecessarily embittered."

Constance did her best to obey her beloved

husband's injunctions: but she could not altogether subdue her emotions; and it was amidst bitterest tears and sobs that she murmured the last farewell.

"Remember, Juliana!" said the Marquis, with a significant look, as he pressed his sister-in-law's hand: and he then hastily conducted his wife out of the cottage.

CHAPTER CLXVI.

THE FLIGHT.

JULIANA was now alone in the parlour, whence her brother-in-law and sister had just issued forth; and most lonely indeed did she feel. Her heart experienced a desolation such as it had scarcely ever known before,—no, not even when her exposure was effected by Mr. Hawkshaw at Saxondale Castle—nor again when she beheld all her cunningly devised plans in respect to the Viscount de Chateauneuf shattered to pieces. It was true, she thought to herself, that she had not married an impostor in rank: but she had espoused a beggar with regard to purse—and her prospects seemed gloomy indeed.

Suddenly she bethought herself that she had not ascertained from her husband how much money he had on this occasion brought back with him from Spain; and she ascended for this purpose to the chamber where he had lain down to rest. She was in one of those moods when it was little likely she would trouble herself about disturbing him in the midst of slumber; and she entered abruptly, without any precaution. He was not asleep; and rising up, sat on the bed, surveying her for a few moments with a peculiar look. He at once saw that there was a considerable change in her manner towards him; and for an instant an expression of uneasiness flitted over his features: but quickly composing them again, he said, "Have they taken their departure?"

"They have," responded Juliana. "Will you have the goodness to inform me what amount you have brought with you from the other side of the Pyrenees?—for methinks that therein consists our entire fortune."

"I have some twenty-five thousand francs," replied the Count de Toledo—the sum which he thus specified, being a thousand pounds in English money.

"And when that sum is gone, how are we to live?" asked Juliana. "Of course you cannot fail to understand that I now know everything—that your estates are confiscated—that your position is hopeless—and that you must never again think of revisiting your native land. Indeed, I fear that so far from having received any supplies at the hands of your intendant, you must be largely indebted to the bounty of your friends; and I do not see how you will ever acquit yourself of these liabilities."

Juliana spoke in a cold manner, but yet with a certain degree of bitterness in her accents; while her husband listened with silent attention until she had finished, and his eyes were fixed keenly and searchingly upon her.

"If my estates be in reality all confiscated," he observed, "you do not, I presume, intend to make the circumstance a subject of reproach?"

"To speak frankly," answered Juliana, "I do not think you acted well by concealing from me, when you offered marriage, the real position in which you were placed in respect to your Government, and the possibility—nay, more—the probability of your estates being confiscated by the advent of a hostile Ministry to power. You should have dealt candidly with me——"

"And pray, Juliana," interrupted the Count de Toledo, his features assuming a sudden expression of mingled fierceness and hardihood, "did you deal with the fullest frankness towards me?"

"What mean you?" ejaculated the lady, seized with trepidation as all her antecedents swept through her mind.

"I mean," rejoined her husband, "that when you informed me you were Lady Saxondale's daughter—that your brother was Lord Saxondale—that your sister had married Villebelle the eminent diplomatist, you forgot to add certain little incidents in respect to yourself."

"Ah!" murmured Juliana, becoming pale as death: but with a desperate effort to regain her effrontery, she said in a haughty tone, "If calumniating tongues have made themselves busy with my name,—you, as my husband, ought to defend me, instead of having, even for a single moment, the appearance of attaching credibility to the whisperings of scandal."

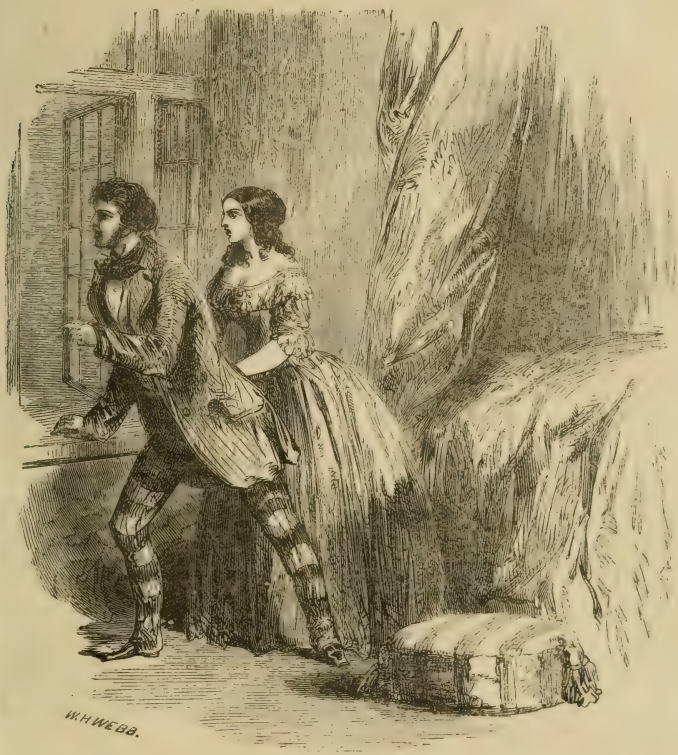
"I am afraid, Juliana," answered the Count de Toledo, "that it would be rather a difficult thing to convince the Durands that you did not live with them under the name of Madame Chesterfield—that you were not in a way to become a mother when residing beneath their roof—and that you did not, even then and there, intrigue with the Viscount de Chateauneuf."

Juliana sank down upon a seat, like one annihilated. It was utterly impossible to deny facts which had evidently come with all corroborative details to her husband's knowledge. At that instant she hated him: she felt that whatsoever degree of affection—or rather of liking towards him, which his own love had engendered in her mind, was now completely destroyed: for the instant that he became an accuser, she viewed him in the light of an enemy.

"Now, Juliana, you perceive," he said, addressing her in a milder and more soothing voice, "that if there were any deficiency of candour on my side, there was far more on your's. Whatsoever concealment was practised by me was the veriest trifle, in comparison to that adopted by you. But I do not intend to give utterance to reproaches: I should not have made these allusions at all, were it not to convince you that you had no right to upbraid me."

"And have you all along been acquainted with those circumstances?" inquired Juliana, still covered with shame and confusion.

"No," responded the Count. "But let me tell you that at the very first, when our acquaintance began, I suspected there was something peculiar attached to your history. A young lady, unmarried, living apart from her family——But no matter! it is useless to dwell upon details. Suffice it to say that I never knew the whole truth



until the other day, when I met the Durands in Spain——"

"Ah! you met them?" ejaculated Juliana. "They told you that they saw me in the village—they revealed everything——vile gossips, treacherous scandalmongers that they are!"—and her countenance was flushed with indignation and rage.

"You would indeed do well never to speak to them again, if you should happen to encounter them," observed her husband quickly. "And now, Juliana, no more in respect to the past!—there shall be no upbraidings on either side. Whatever you may have been, I love you: you know that I love you—and that is sufficient!"

It was *not* however sufficient for Juliana. As we have already said, her own liking towards the Count had suddenly been altered into a sentiment very much resembling hatred. She felt that he had deceived her in respect to his true position; and for this she experienced rancour against him. But in order to silence her upbraidings, he had suddenly taken the far higher ground of an accuser: he had conquered—he had subdued her: she had been humiliated in his presence—she had not even the satisfaction of giving additional vent to her own feelings of animosity against him. Her pride was in every way humbled;—and such a position was not at all a pleasurable one for the Countess de Toledo. Moreover, she could not help fancying that she was not as yet fully acquainted with the worst in respect to her husband. The recollection of that man who was represented to have been a labourer on his estates, and who had extorted large sums from him, haunted her mind. She remembered, likewise, that the letters which she had written to her sister, had been entrusted to the Count to be conveyed to the post, but had never reached their destination. It was evident he had suppressed them,—doubtless, thought Juliana, be-

cause he feared the knowledge of his actual position must inevitably reach her if she corresponded with Constance. But she dared not prolong the discourse with her husband by demanding fresh explanations: he was acquainted with a portion of her past life's shame, and could thus silence her with a word. But she felt that henceforth all confidence was at an end between them. On *her* side there would be mistrust of all her husband's proceedings, if at all mysterious: and on *his* side there could be no very exalted opinion of his wife's virtue.

A few days after the departure of the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle,—who, it should be observed, were on a temporary trip to Paris, his lordship still retaining the Spanish Embassy,—the Count de Toledo drove Juliana out in the phaeton. They made, as usual, a considerable circuit of the delightful scenery of the neighbourhood; and as they were returning through the village, they perceived some travellers just alighting from a post-chaise which had at the moment stopped at the inn. These travellers were an elderly gentleman and lady; and Juliana, recognising them at the first glance, ejaculated, "Those vile Durands!"

"The Durands?" echoed the Count de Toledo: and at the same moment the eyes of the old gentleman and his wife were turned upon himself and Juliana.

Quick as lightning did the Count toss the reins to Juliana, bidding her drive on; and springing from the vehicle, he hastened up to the Durands, from whose lips burst forth ejaculations which to Juliana's ears sounded as indicative of a most unwelcome recognition. The Count said something in a low hurried tone to the Durands; and they at once accompanied him into the hotel. Juliana was much amazed at witnessing all these proceedings,—as were likewise the stable-men and postilions, who were changing the horses. She drove slowly on, utterly bewildered as to what it could all mean,—her husband's precipitate movements—the Durands' ejaculations—and that sudden entrance of the three into the village hostelry! But as Juliana's thoughts grew more collected, she concluded that her husband was very probably intent upon inducing the Durands, either by threats or persuasion, to abstain from propagating reports in that neighbourhood, which would prove ruinous to her own reputation.

She drove slowly on towards the cottage; and in about ten minutes the Count de Toledo rejoined her there. She was about to question him as to what had taken place, and whether the Durands had been completely silenced,—when he hurried past her, with a few words to the effect that he would tell her everything presently—and rushed up-stairs to the bedchamber. In a few moments he descended again; and sped away from the cottage. What could this mean? Had he paid a visit to the strong-box? was some deep inroad now being made upon their funds? had the Durands demanded a bribe as the price of their secrecy, notwithstanding that they had just become enriched by the death of their relation at Barcelona? Yet in no other way could Juliana account for her husband's hasty and excited proceedings; and she thought to herself that if their pecuniary resources were thus to be so continuously encroached upon by extortionate demands, they would soon be reduced to the most necessitous straits. Anxiously did she await the Count's return. In about half-an hour he came back: but there was a visible trouble upon his features. She scarcely dared to question him—for she felt assured that in whatsoever answers he might have to give, reference to her past shame must be inevitably made.

"You are probably surprised, Juliana," he said, after three or four agitated turns to and fro in the parlour, "at what has just occurred. But no—you can scarcely be surprised: you must have comprehended full well——"

"Those vile Durands insisted on a bribe?" said the Countess hurriedly.

"Yes: and for your sake I was compelled to submit to their extortionate demands. Our funds are now reduced to a few thousand francs."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Juliana; "have those detestable people plundered you to such a fearful extent?"

"They have," rejoined the Count; "and I almost regret that I submitted to their demands. I have no faith in them—I are able lest, notwithstanding the bribe, they should be base enough to betray what they know! Juliana," he added suddenly, "we must leave this neighbourhood!"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed: "that has been my wish for some days past—indeed ever since my sister and brother-in-law were here. Let us go farther into the interior of France—let us realize, by the sale of the horses and carriages, as much money as we can get together——"

"But Juliana, if we remain in France, how are we to live?" inquired the Count. "Neither yourself nor I are accustomed to habits of frugality: we cannot all in a moment settle ourselves down to economies which would amount to absolute privations."

"I can obtain certain supplies from my mother," exclaimed Juliana.

"Not enough to enable us to live comfortably," rejoined the Count; "and I am not one who can devote himself to any employment for the purpose of increasing our resources. No!—things have come to a crisis—the die is cast—my resolution is taken!"

"To do what?" demanded Juliana, as in sudden affright she anticipated the reply to her question.

"To return into Spain," he said, his features becoming all in a moment sternly and fiercely resolute.

"To dare death?" ejaculated Juliana. "No—it must not be! The Marquis of Villebelle conjured me to use my influence to prevent you from adopting so mad a course."

"But it is necessary, Juliana: it is our only alternative! There I can always command funds," he added, with a sort of exultation; "but here, on this side of the Pyrences, we may have to encounter poverty. Nay, more—we shall never be safe against extortions and exactions. Settle where we will, the Durands may find us out: and what *then* becomes of your reputation? Juliana, I am decided: we go into Spain! Trust to me, to devise means for ensuring my own safety. You possess a strong mind—a fine spirit: you are equal to the emergency of danger——"

"But is it possible that you purpose to go boldly to your estate?" inquired the Countess: "will you take possession of your mansion?"

"I will go into the midst of my people," exclaimed the Count de Toledo, once more with that tone and look of exultation which his countenance had already worn during this discourse;—"and rest assured, they will not suffer me to be captured so long as life remains in them!"

"But is not this a desperate mode of existence upon which we are about to enter?" asked Juliana: "will it not be a far more troubled and unsettled one, than our life would be if we were to remain in France, even though subjected to extortions and threats of exposure?"

"Juliana, it is useless to reason against my resolve," replied the Count. "We go into Spain. To-morrow I will dispose of the carriages: whatsoever little debts are outstanding, shall be paid. The horses we will keep for our own purposes; and on the following day will we cross the frontier."

Juliana could not urge any farther remonstrance: she saw that her husband was resolute; and she endeavoured to tranquillize herself with the reflection that his position perhaps would not be so very perilous, after all, in the midst of his own dependants,—or else he would scarcely be so outrageously rash as to carry his project into execution. At all events, she felt that no danger could be incurred by herself; and if the worst ensued, she would be left a widow with an honourable title, though her husband perished on the political scaffold. She now cared too little for him to be particularly afflicted at the contemplation of this eventuality: while, on the other hand, if he should really be enabled to maintain himself in the repossession of his estates, she might yet play the part of the feudal baroness, as she had so much longed to do. She was well aware that Spain was in an unsettled condition—that the authority of the central government at Madrid was but indifferently maintained over the spirited population of Catalonia: and the longer she reflected on the course about to be entered upon, the more did she deem it probable that her husband's views might be carried out, and that the warnings of her brother-in-law would prove to have been stretched and overstrained.

It was a little after ten o'clock in the evening of this same day, that the Count and Juliana retired to their chamber. But scarcely had they ascended thither, when a trampling of horses' feet, and sounds as if of the clatter of weapons, coming from the main road, met their ears. In an instant the Count threw open the window: the moonlight flooded the atmosphere—and the figures of several mounted *gendarmes* were distinctly visible to himself and Juliana. They had already sprung from their steeds; and it was the din of their steel-sheathed swords clattering against their sides, which had reached their ears. A wild but vague terror suddenly seized on Juliana: nor was her alarm dissipated, when the Count, abruptly closing the window, said, "We must fly!"

"Fly! Wherefore? whither?" demanded his wife in an agony of apprehension. "What have you done? why come the officers of justice here?"

"We must fly, Juliana!" ejaculated the Count: "there is not a moment to lose! I will explain everything presently! Fasten on your riding-skirt—quick! quick! Follow me!"

She obeyed mechanically, and with all the haste of wild and nervous alarm;—indeed, she was too much bewildered for deliberate reflection. Her husband filled his pockets with all the coin that remained in the casket: they descended the stairs precipitately, and passed out by a back door to the stable. Two horses were saddled and bridled in almost the twinkling of an eye,—Juliana thus caparisoning her own steed for herself, which she well knew how to do; and she had all the ready activity of fortitude at this moment, notwithstanding the wild vague terrors which filled her soul.

"Now courage, Juliana!" said the Count, as he lifted her on her horse: and the next moment he sprang upon his own. "Away!"

As he uttered this last word, the loud knocking of the *gendarmes* at the cottage-door reached their ears; and it should be observed that all these proceedings on their part, conducted with such lightning rapidity, had been unobserved by the officers of justice,—inasmuch as they took place entirely in the rear of the dwelling, while the *gendarmes* had approached the cottage from the front.

"Away!"—that word was the signal for their departure.

They dashed through the back-garden: the low fence separating it from the orchard, was cleared by the two steeds: but in the orchard itself a couple of *gendarmes*, on foot, at once sprang towards them. It was evident that the precincts of the cottage were surrounded by the officers: but a word of encouragement burst from the Count's lips—with the speed of a hurricane the two animals dashed through the orchard—a carbine was fired by one of the *gendarmes*—the next moment the report of his companion's weapon likewise rang through the air—and the bullets whistled past the ears of the fugitives. The hedge at the extremity of the orchard, was cleared: the steeds, stretching forth like greyhounds, sped over the meadows—until, in a few minutes, the road to Perpignan was reached, after the short but rapid circuit thus made. Meantime the cry of an escape had rung from the lips of the *gendarmes*: their horses were remounted—and a chase was quickly instituted. It was however ineffectual: the Count and Juliana rode on as if upon the wings of the wind; and when they presently halted to listen, as well as to breathe their panting coursers, no sounds of pursuit reached their ears from behind.

"You have borne yourself bravely, Juliana!" cried the Count, in thrilling tones of exultation.

"But what means all this?" inquired his wife. "In the name of heaven, tell me—wherefore came those officers? what have you done?"

"Away, away, Juliana!" exclaimed her husband: "this is no moment for explanations!"

Once more did the steeds career along, although there were still no sounds of pursuit: the *gendarmes* were evidently either distanced or at fault. Ever and anon, when the swiftness of the fugitives' pace was relaxed, Juliana wildly, vehemently, and passionately demanded what her husband had done that he should fly from the officers?—but on each occasion he compelled her to urge on her courser again; and thus they proceeded for a couple of hours, until Perpignan was in sight, its buildings appeared, like dark crags, against the horizon of the sky that was flooded with the moonlight.

"This way!" exclaimed the Count: and they swept into a by-road which enabled them to leave

Perpignan far away on the left,—while by a short cut they reached the eastern extremity of the Pyrenees. On they went,—scarcely relaxing their speed until long past midnight,—when the Count suddenly exclaimed in an exultant voice, "The boundary is crossed! we are now in Spain!"

Juliana was much exhausted: and though they now walked their steeds, many minutes elapsed ere she could recover breath sufficiently to renew the vehement inquiries which she had already put a dozen times during the journey, but to which she had received no satisfactory answer.

"Now will you tell me," she said, in a peremptory and imperious voice, as if determined not to be put off any longer,—"will you tell me wherefore the officers of justice should have sought you—and why you fled from them?"

"In a short time, Juliana," responded her husband, in a voice that still vibrated with a strange wild exultation,—"you shall know all. Interrogate me not now! It is useless: you cannot force me to answer."

"But I insist!" she cried, once more full of a vague and unknown terror. "There is something fearfully unnatural in all this!"

"There will be something thrillingly exciting for you presently," rejoined the Count. "Ah! I already feel a different being: it seems to me as if I had escaped from a gaol to breathe the fresh air of freedom! Come on, Juliana dearest—come on, my gloriously handsome wife!—and in a brief space, soon after morning dawns, our destination will be reached!"

"Go we direct to your mansion?" asked Juliana, somewhat encouraged, as well as to a certain degree dispossessed of her fears, by the exuberant spirits which the Count de Toledo now displayed.

"We go to our home, Juliana," he responded; "and again make yourself happy with the assurance that you will find persons there who will not fail to protect your husband."

"But if your estates have been confiscated," said Juliana, bewildered with her thoughts, "were they not bestowed upon some one else? or have they not been sold? and will you not find your mansion in the hands of a new possessor?"

"No fear of all that!" cried the Count. "So long as I enjoy freedom, I defy the powers or the terrors of the law to prevent me from treading at will over my domain in wild mountainous Catalonia! And as for my mansion—I repeat, you will see none but friendly faces there. Come, Juliana—let us speed onward again. I am in haste to introduce you to your new home!"

The Countess longed to repeat her question, as to wherefore her husband should have fled from the *gendarmes:* but there was now so much authority in his manner—he had assumed an air of so much conscious superiority and power, from the first moment that the boundary was crossed—that she felt somewhat overawed—her naturally proud spirit quailed—and she dared not again venture upon peremptory or imperious interrogatory. They continued their way: the town of Figueras was passed upon the left hand: they plunged deeper and deeper into the wilds of Catalonia; and as the first glimmering of dawn appeared above the eastern hills, they came within sight of a tower the gray summit of which was appeared above a grove of cork-trees.

"Behold our home!" exclaimed the Count de Toledo, pointing in the direction of the structure.

Juliana's first impression was that this tower was merely a small portion of a large castellated edifice which would presently develop itself to her view: but she was surprised that if they were now on her husband's domain, there should be no signs of culture—no cottages, where his dependants dwelt, scattered about—no herds grazing—no flocks pasturing. The entire scenery, as she swept her looks around, was wild and savage—in some instances, however, sublime and grand, with towering height and roaring waterfall. But still, if this were a sample of the estate, it struck her that no matter how vast the domain belonging to her husband, it was a miracle if it produced any revenues at all.

"Are we upon the soil that calls you lord?" she asked, with a strange and unaccountable timidity.

"Yes: far as the eye can reach on every side!"—and there was still exultation in his tone.

Juliana liked not the response; and yet she scarcely knew wherefore. She thought to herself that in compensation for this savage and unproductive portion of the domain, there must be other parts well cultured and exceedingly profitable. They now entered the wood of cork-trees, and ascended a rising path towards the entrance of the tower. The dawn was brightening; and Juliana perceived, through the vista of the trees, that the edifice was half in ruins—that it was of small dimensions—and that it stood alone, utterly unconnected with the spacious array of buildings, which, with casements, balconies, turrets, and pinnacles, she had expected to break upon her view. The immense lawn upon which she fancied it might look—the gravelled walk—the pieces of artificial water—the fruit and flower gardens—the outhouses for numerous dependants—the adjacent parks and pleasure-grounds—and the meadows covered with flocks and herds,—all the evidences, in short, of wealth—all the external show of luxury and comfort, which she had anticipated to behold ——where were they? She looked around in wild terror: there was something dismal and dreary, awful and dispiriting, in the aspect of the sombre wood—mean and sordid, poverty-stricken and gaol-like, in the old ruined tower.

"Where is your mansion?" she asked, hurriedly and excitedly, of her husband.

"There—before you!" was his response, as he pointed to the tower.

"That?" shrieked forth Juliana, well nigh falling from her horse. "And those people—those wild-looking people?" she added, as several men and women, in the picturesque mountaineer costume of Catalonia—but the former carrying guns in their hands and having swords by their sides—suddenly emerged from the tower.

"Those are my people!" replied her husband. "The women will be your attendants—the men will fight for me until the very death."

"Great God!" said Juliana, in a dying voice. "Who are you?——Speak! who are you?"

"I am Ramon de Collantes!" rejoined the false Count de Toledo: and his arm was at the same instant thrown round his wife's form, as with a piercing shriek she was about to tumble headlong from her horse.

CHAPTER CLXVII.

THE BANDITTI'S TOWER.

When Juliana came back to consciousness, she found herself stretched upon a bed in a poorly furnished apartment: two of the women whom she had already seen, were bending over her, administering restoratives: her husband, standing at the foot of the curtainless couch, was gazing upon her. She seemed to be awaking from a hideous dream. Wildly her looks were flung around, as if to acquire evidences that she dreamt no longer: then, as the sickening, horrifying conviction swept in upon her soul, that everything she fancied was indeed but too terribly true, she closed her eyes again, as if to shut out whatsoever objects made her thus keenly alive to her fearful position. Slowly however she opened those orbs once more; and in mute consternation—under the influence of an awful numbing dismay—she looked slowly around.

The one small window was deeply set in the thick masonry of the chamber, and had no drapery. A rude table—a few chairs—a rug upon the floor—the bed she lay on—and some other trifling articles of furniture, constituted the appointments of the room in which the brilliant Juliana, who at Saxondale House had slept upon down, and beneath a canopy of velvet, with draperies of satin and muslin, now found herself. The two women who ministered unto her, were exceedingly handsome; and with their picturesque apparel, and the profusion of jewellery which decorated their persons, they seemed far superior to the wretchedness of their abode. Her husband, as already stated, was standing at the foot of the bed,—watching with an outward air of calmness the effect which would be produced in his wife by this awakening to the consciousness of her position. His arms were folded across his breast: he looked like one who was resolute to meet whatsoever upbraidings might be levelled against him, and to glory in the fact that he was the famous robber-chief Ramon de Collantes.

He now made a sign for the two women to leave the chamber; and when they had departed, he took a chair and sat down by the side of the couch. Juliana shuddered visibly at his approach. For an instant a look of sternest displeasure appeared upon his countenance: but as it quickly passed away, he said in a lofty tone, as if he chose to rise high above all reproach and upbraiding which might be vented against him, "Now, Juliana, at length you are in the home to which you have so much longed to come!"

"This my home?" she exclaimed, with another visible tremor, as her eyes swept around the dreary, desolate apartment. "No, no—I will not remain here! Let me go hence! I will depart alone!"—and she sprang up from the couch.

"Not so, Juliana!" said her husband, catching her by the wrist, and compelling her to sit down by the side of the couch: though in justice it must be observed that he used no more force than was absolutely necessary. "You are my wife—and here you must remain."

"Remain here?" she ejaculated: and for an instant she was about to give vent to a violent gust of mingled rage and grief: but the demeanour of Ramon de Collantes overawed the one, and compelled her to stifle the other. "Tell me," she said, suddenly growing calm—but it was the unnatural calmness of utter despair,—"have you brought me hither to dwell amongst brigands?"

"For the last nine months you have been the wife of a brigand-chief," answered Collantes; "and you must accept your destiny."

"Yes—but I knew it not——God knows how far—how very far I was from suspecting it."

"To be sure!" ejaculated her husband: "how could it have been otherwise? We each had our secrets; and we kept them as long as we could. You had been the paramour of other men when you were wooed by me: I was a bandit-captain when I wooed you. I have promised to reproach you not: in common justice should you abstain from upbraiding me."

"But that false title which you assumed?" ejaculated Juliana, half frantic.

"I had as much right to usurp the rank of a nobleman, Juliana, as you had to assume the position of a virtuous woman. If I were a false Count when I led you to the altar, you were not a virgin-bride when you came into my arms."

"My God!" murmured the unhappy lady, again shivering all over: then suddenly she cried, "But how was it that my own maid deceived me? how was it that she assured me you were all that you represented yourself—that you visited at the Spanish Embassy in Paris——"

"Because your maid was accessible to my gold," answered Ramon de Collantes. "Do you suppose, Juliana, that I foresaw not that you would make inquiries? I knew that you were a thorough woman of the world; and I played as deep a game as your own."

"Why did you marry me?" demanded Juliana abruptly.

"Because I loved you—truly and sincerely loved you! I love you now—and shall ever love you, unless you give me cause to hate you. I more than half suspected, when I wooed you, that something had gone wrong with your antecedents. But I cared not for that! It was sufficient that you struck my fancy—and I resolved to possess you as a wife."

"And that tale of the change of Ministry, when we were travelling southward——"

"An opportunity which presented itself for devising an excuse not to bear you into Spain, but to stop short on the Pyrenean frontier, whence I myself could pay periodical visits——"

"To your intendant?" said Juliana, with bitter sarcasm.

"Do not speak thus—or I shall not love you much longer," answered Collantes, haughtily and sternly. "Rather thank me for having from time to time re-entered Catalonia to join my brave band for a few days, and levy contributions on travellers who passed by."

"And that man who had been a labourer on your estates?" said Juliana, still somewhat ironically, though not with so much bitterness as before.

"A scoundrel who was once a member of my band, but who through very cowardice deserted. For want of a passport, he lingered just over the frontier; and my evil destiny threw me, as you

saw, in his way. I was compelled to submit to the villain's extortions——"

"And that faithful valet of your's?"

"One of my band likewise—but a brave and trustworthy individual. He will join us doubtless in the course of the day: for the French *gendarmes* had no reason to molest him."

"Those letters of mine, which were directed to my sister?" said Juliana, continuing her queries.

"Think you that I was foolish enough to put you in correspondence with the Marchioness of Villebelle, when the Marquis could tell her that there was no such person as the Count de Toledo and she would have written you this much back in her very first answer? It was a cursed fatality that threw the Villebelles in the way of my brave band and myself: but we knew not who they were: we are not in the habit of inquiring the names of those travellers whom we politely detain for a few minutes on their road."

"What passed between you and the Marquis when you encountered each other at the cottage?" asked Juliana, thus continuing her feverishly rapid questions.

"Ah! that was indeed a romantic incident," ejaculated Collantes, with a laugh: "and would tell effectively upon the stage in a melodrama where brigands figure. The Marquis was walking in the garden, as you recollect. He thought he recognised me: he was astounded—he could not believe his eyes. He saw me waving my hand to some one: he looked around—he perceived you at your chamber window, agitating your kerchief. He rushed up to me, and demanded who I was. Somehow or another it instantaneously struck me who *he* must be; and I saw that I was safe.—'In Spain,' I answered, 'I am, as you suspect, Ramon de Collantes: here I am the Count de Toledo; and your sister-in-law is my wife.'—The Marquis, like every shrewd diplomatist, though he is but quite a young man—not older than myself—recovered his self-possession in an instant. I gave the horse to a groom; and we walked aside together. I offered to return him his money: but he scornfully rejected it. I asked him if he purposed to betray me? He reflected, and said that it would be better not. I told him I thought so too. But he laid down conditions, which were that I should never again cross the Pyrenees—that I should go into the interior of France—keep my feigned name—and endeavour to earn my living honourably. Of course I pledged myself to anything: for I was resolved to hide the startling truth from your knowledge as long as possible. We had a little more conversation; and I hurried up to see you: for though it was during the interval of our separation that I had obtained an insight into your antecedents, and my suspicions of your past wantonness had been fully confirmed by the Durands, yet I loved you as much as ever, and longed to embrace you. I pretended exhaustion—in the first place, because the Marquis had stipulated I should not appear before his wife; and in the second place, because I had no inclination to appear again before him, while you were present. Doubtless the Marquis went and informed your sister who your husband really was."

"Yes, yes—he did! I understand it all now," exclaimed Juliana, wringing her hands. "Good heavens! what must have been the agony of poor Constance? what must she have thought? No wonder that she wept so bitterly—that she sobbed so convulsively—that she embraced me so fervidly! Ah! and how delicately did the Marquis himself behave,—not betraying you—nor yet on his own side having recourse to falsehoods to save you from exposure!"

"The Marquis is a diplomatist," rejoined Ramon de Collantes, with a smile; "and was not likely to be at a loss how to manage such matters."

"But those Durands," exclaimed Juliana; "how fell you in with them?"

"Quite in a professional way," replied Collantes. "They were journeying towards Barcelona: I and my gallant band stopped them; and as they had no great amount of ready money about them, we examined their papers. A letter in the old gentleman's pocket-book made me aware that he was going to Barcelona to receive an inheritance.—'Oh! oh!' thought I to myself; 'we must keep you good folks prisoners for a while, until you furnish a ransom.'—So we bore them both off to the tower here; and old Durand drew a cheque upon a banker at Barcelona,—one of my men setting off to get it cashed. This caused a delay of a day or two, during which the Durands were kept close prisoners at the tower. In the course of some conversation between them, you may conceive my astonishment when I heard them talking of the Countess of Toledo whom they had recently met at a certain village. Thereupon I questioned them; and wormed out as much of your antecedents as they themselves were acquainted with. Little did they think they were making all these revelations to your own husband! Well, the man came back from Barcelona with the ransom—a thousand pounds, calculated by your English money; and the Durands were suffered to depart."

Juliana could really have forgiven her husband for this one robbery, inasmuch as it had been perpetrated upon the individuals who betrayed their knowledge of her past career.

"You may conceive," resumed Ramon de Collantes, "how terrified I was, when a few days after my return to the cottage, we beheld the Durands alighting from the post-chaise on their way homeward. I rushed up to them, as you saw me: I was only just in time to stop the ejaculations of complete betrayal which were bursting from their lips.—'Say nothing!' I whispered in a hurried voice; 'and your money shall be restored!'—They required nothing better; and I accompanied them into the inn. They had seen you with me; and as we entered the tavern, the landlord officiously exclaimed, 'Good day, my lord Count of Toledo!'—The Durands thus discovered that your husband was none other than the famous Ramon de Collantes. Knowing therefore that we resided in the neighbourhood, they unhesitatingly agreed to wait while I hastened home to get the thousand pounds to restore to them. This made an immense hole in all my share of plunder which I had brought away from Spain a few days back: but I might have put up with that loss lightly, if I could have trusted the Durands. When, however, they had received their money, and had taken their departure, I began to reflect that I was not safe with such gossips and scandal-

mergers. Therefore my resolve was taken to bid farewell to France: for, as I had plundered a French subject—although in another country—yet I was well aware that the authorities, if once put on the alert, would arrest me at a venture,—so that if a French tribunal declared itself incompetent to try me for a deed done in Spain, the *gendarmes* would nevertheless have marched me over the frontier and given me into the custody of the Spanish authorities at Figueras. Well, what I apprehended on the part of those Durands came to pass. On leaving the village, they must have given information at the very next town concerning me; and if the *gendarmes* had only done their work a little more cleverly and without so much noise, I should at this moment be in a French gaol instead of in my own tower. However, the necessity that was felt to have such a posse of officers to effect the capture, was the highest compliment that could be paid to your renowned husband Don Ramon de Collantes. Now, I think all explanations have been given; and you have nothing to do, Juliana, but to resign yourself to your new mode of life."

"Ramon!" said the lady, falling upon her knees at her bandit-husband's feet, "I beseech you to let me depart hence! You say that you love me——"

"Yes, Juliana—and too well to lose you," interrupted Collantes, forcing her to rise from her suppliant posture. "It is useless to bandy farther words on a point respecting which I am fully decided. You cannot go hence: it is impossible!"

"At least suffer me to write to my sister!" exclaimed the wretched Juliana.

"No good purpose, my dear wife," responded the bandit, "can possibly be answered thereby. Doubtless the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle will read in the newspaper that the celebrated Ramon de Collantes had for some time past been living under a disguised name in a French village of the Eastern Pyrenees—and that when the *gendarmes* went to capture him, he effected his escape in a characteristic manner. The same journalists will not fail to record how his wife played the heroine in the most admirable manner; and thus the Marquis and Marchioness of Villebelle are sure to hear all that has taken place. There is no necessity to write and tell them exactly where you are: and moreover, for certain obvious reasons, it might be inconvenient."

At this moment one of the females entered the apartment, to inform Ramon de Collantes that he was wanted below. She then retired; and the bandit-captain said to Juliana, "Do your best to keep up your spirits and make yourself comfortable. I will presently despatch one of the women to Barcelona; and she shall purchase you all kinds of necessaries that you may require. You can give her a list,—and we will also do something to render the rooms more suitable for your accommodation. The amount of freedom you will enjoy, depends entirely on your conduct towards me: but I warn you against any attempt at escape. It is painful for me thus to speak—but methinks it is necessary."

Don Ramon de Collantes thereupon quitted the room, leaving Juliana a prey to reflections which may be more easily imagined than described. On descending to the ground-floor of the tower, the bandit-captain found that half-a-dozen of his men had just brought in, as prisoners, an English gentleman and his valet,—certain circumstances having led the outlaws to believe that a goodly ransom might be obtained for the liberation of the captives in this instance. It appeared that the gentleman and his valet were travelling post towards Madrid, having entered Spain by way of Figueras—that the detachment of banditti stopped the equipage—and that after desperate but ineffectual attempts at resistance, the traveller and his domestic were overpowered. There was no considerable sum of ready-money found upon the gentleman's person—no more than he might have deemed sufficient for his expenses to the Spanish capital: but, on the other hand, he had in his pocket-book letters of credit on a banker in that city for a very large amount. It was this fact which—in pursuance of their usual policy in such cases—had induced the banditti to bring the traveller and his valet as captives to the tower. The post-chaise had been left to return to Figueras,—the banditti however allowing the gentleman to pay the postilions their due—a course which they invariably adopted, and which led to the very natural supposition that there might be some little private understanding between the outlaws and the drivers in those districts.

The gentleman was about six or seven-and-twenty years of age—tall—well made—and handsome,—with a frank ingenuous expression of countenance. His hair was of a rich brown, curling naturally: his eyes were blue: his features were somewhat delicate, and classically modelled. Altogether, his appearance was most agreeable: his voice was rich and harmonious; and his manners were polished and elegant. But now he wore a haughty and indignant look: he betrayed not the slightest sentiment of fear: indeed, his courage had been well proven in his resistance to the banditti; and it was fortunate for him that in being overpowered at last, he had sustained no hurt more serious than a few bruises. His valet, also an Englishman, was a middle-aged, sedate-looking person—but one who could no doubt display a courageous resolution in the moment of emergency.

Ramon de Collantes addressed the English gentleman in the Spanish tongue first: but finding that it was little understood by the traveller, he proceeded to speak in French. In this language the captive was proficient; and the discourse therefore flowed on easily. The brigand-chief assured Mr. Forester,—for such the gentleman's name appeared to be, according to his passport and letters of credit,—that he need be under no apprehension in respect to his life, nor of ill-treatment, provided he would consent to purchase his liberty; and that during the interval which must elapse ere the ransom-money could be obtained from Madrid, he should experience as much attention and as good accommodation as under circumstances might be afforded. Mr. Forester,—whom the reader will recollect as having been William Deveril's second in the duel with Lord Harold Staunton,—saw no alternative but to accept the proposition. He found himself a prisoner in the midst of a wild region—at the mercy of a lawless band; and he was compelled to subdue his pride for his own personal convenience

It is true that he was only travelling for his pleasure, being of no profession and possessing a handsome independent income: but still, though his time was so completely his own, it appeared to him by no means agreeable to pass more of it than was absolutely necessary in the quarters of a bandit horde. He therefore, though not without reluctance, consented to the terms laid down by Ramon de Collantes.

But now arose some little difficulty. This was not a mere matter of presenting a cheque at a banker's in any city or town more or less remote, and which could be accomplished by any one of the men suitably apparelled in a simple citizen's garb for the purpose: but it was to obtain cash on a letter of credit which by rights should be presented at the Madrid banker's by the individual in whose favour it was drawn. It was therefore a proceeding that required tact and management; and Ramon de Collantes saw no alternative but to undertake the business himself. At the first thought he did not much relish the idea of leaving his wife, whom he really loved, alone for ten days or a fortnight at the tower, during the very first period of her residence there, and when her impatient spirit ought to be checked by all his power of control. But his second reflection was of quite the opposite character; and he reasoned that it would perhaps be all the better to leave her thus for a short space to the monotonous kind of existence she would have to lead, so that on his return his presence would be welcomed by her as a cheering relief. Therefore Ramon de Collantes decided upon proceeding in person to Madrid, to obtain the ransom-money.

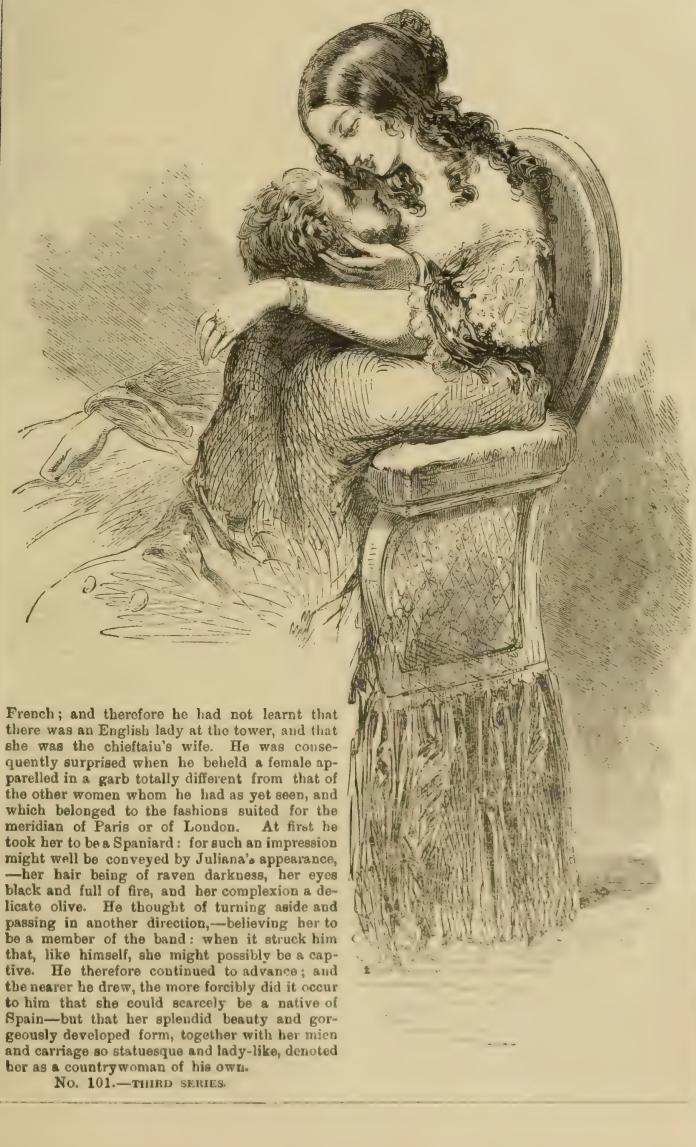
He represented to Mr. Forester that it was absolutely necessary he should write some credentials which would sufficiently account to the Madrid banker for the letter of credit being presented by another person instead of the individual in whose favour it was drawn. To this proposition Forester assented without much difficulty: for he himself saw that it was absolutely necessary, and he was too anxious to recover his freedom to throw any obstacle in the way. He accordingly wrote as if from Figueras, stating that he had been suddenly taken ill there—that his funds were exhausted—and that inasmuch as his friend Senor Escosura (the name assumed by Ramon de Collantes for his intended journey) was about to visit Madrid, he had entrusted him with the mission of obtaining a supply of ready cash.

When thus possessed of the necessary documents, Ramon de Collantes ascended to the chamber where he had left his wife; and informed her that circumstances compelled him to undertake an immediate journey, on which he might be some days absent. Juliana instantaneously perceived that this occurrence might probably furnish her, if she played her game well, with an opportunity of escape: but in order to obtain this opportunity, it was necessary she should have as much freedom as possible—to which end it was equally requisite to throw her husband off his guard. She therefore at once simulated grief and alarm at the thought of separation. She begged him to forgive her for the first feelings of aversion which she had exhibited towards her new home,—representing to him that he must make all allowances under the circumstances in which she was placed—but vowing that she was not the less interested in his safety. In short, she enacted her part so well as to lull her husband to a certain degree into security on her account: but he nevertheless resolved that until his return she should be continuously watched and have as little liberty as possible. He bade her farewell; and she still kept up her dissimulation by much weeping and sobbing. Previous to his departure, he gave the strictest injunctions to the members of the band as to the precise amount of freedom which his wife and the two prisoners (Mr. Forester and his valet) were respectively to be allowed;—having done which, he set out on his journey.

One of the females appointed to attend upon Juliana, spoke French fluently; and from her lips the brigand-captain's wife accordingly understood that she would be permitted to take exercise within a circuit of a mile of the tower; and a similar communication was made to the prisoners. Juliana learnt from the same source, of the presence of those prisoners at the tower; and on hearing that they were fellow-countrymen, she was suddenly inspired by the secret hope that if she were enabled to communicate with them, they would aid in her escape. She did not however think it prudent to precipitate the means which might be adopted as a test to ascertain whether she should be enabled to communicate with them or not: she therefore remained in her own chamber throughout the whole of that first day of her sojourn at the tower. In the evening the valet who had been left behind at the cottage in the French village, made his appearance at the robbers' stronghold; and Juliana learnt that her own maid—whom she had originally engaged in Paris—had declined to accompany the valet to rejoin her mistress, now that she knew that her master, instead of being the Count de Toledo, was a famous brigand-chief. We should likewise add that Juliana despatched, according to her husband's instructions, one of the women to Barcelona, to make such purchases as were requisite; and in the meantime she managed as well as she was able with all such necessaries for the toilet as the females, whose wardrobes were by no means badly supplied, were enabled to furnish.

On the following day Juliana availed herself of her privilege to walk in the neighbourhood of the tower: and presently she beheld a gentleman whom she at once concluded to be the English prisoner, roaming about likewise. It was beyond the limits of the grove of cork-trees that she thus descried him: but as her looks swept around with a wider range, she noticed six or seven of the banditti posted on eminences at certain intervals, so as to engirdle, as it were with a *cordon* of sentinels, the precincts of the tower. These men seemed to be lounging idly about, as if intent on no particular object: but their carbines were slung over their shoulders—their swords were by their sides—and the sunbeams glinted upon the pistols and the poniard-handles in their belts. Therefore Juliana knew full well why those men were thus dispersed around; and the hope of escape diminished somewhat in her bosom.

Mr. Forester—having maintained the haughtiest reserve towards all the members of the band, both male and female,—had not exchanged any unnecessary word with even those who could speak



French; and therefore he had not learnt that there was an English lady at the tower, and that she was the chieftain's wife. He was consequently surprised when he beheld a female apparelled in a garb totally different from that of the other women whom he had as yet seen, and which belonged to the fashions suited for the meridian of Paris or of London. At first he took her to be a Spaniard: for such an impression might well be conveyed by Juliana's appearance, —her hair being of raven darkness, her eyes black and full of fire, and her complexion a delicate olive. He thought of turning aside and passing in another direction,—believing her to be a member of the band: when it struck him that, like himself, she might possibly be a captive. He therefore continued to advance; and the nearer he drew, the more forcibly did it occur to him that she could scarcely be a native of Spain—but that her splendid beauty and gorgeously developed form, together with her mien and carriage so statuesque and lady-like, denoted her as a countrywoman of his own.

"Then she must be a prisoner!" he thought: and taking off his hat, he made her a courteous salutation.

"Now," said Juliana to herself, "for the test whether or not I am allowed to speak to this English gentleman!"

Her eyes were swept rapidly around as she also advanced: there was no unusual movement amongst the sentries posted at intervals about—no one hurried forth from the tower to forbid this meeting: and with joy as well as with rekindling hope in her heart, she accosted the captive.

"You are a prisoner, if I mistake not?" she said in her most affable manner, but at the same time with a look of commiseration and mournfulness.

"Yes, madam—such is my fate for the present," responded Mr. Forester, perfectly dazzled by the beauty which, diminishing not on a nearer view, characterized the lady. "And you?"

"Alas, a prisoner likewise!" returned Juliana, with a profound sigh. "But what is worse," she went on hurriedly to observe, anxious to get over the requisite explanations, which were as painful as they were unavoidable, with all possible despatch,—"I am the victim of the foulest treachery——But how can I confess it? And yet the tale must be told!—I am the captain's wife."

Mr. Forester staggered with a wild amazement. Was it possible that this lady whose manners had evidently been formed in the most polished circles, and whose splendid beauty was fit to embellish the gilded saloons of fashion, instead of being buried in the midst of Catalonia's wastes,—was it possible that she was the consort of Ramon de Collantes?

"Ah, sir!" cried Juliana, "you may well be smitten with astonishment: but the tale I have told you is only too true. The particulars—humiliating enough for me—can be concisely summed up. I was residing in France—I was thrown in the way of one who bore the name of the Count de Toledo—and whom I beheld living like a nobleman of wealth amongst the gayest circles of Paris. He offered me his hand—he was accepted—and we were married. This was eight or nine months ago——"

"And for nine months you have been in this man's power?" ejaculated Forester, with an astonishment but little abating.

"It was but yesterday that I knew everything," replied Juliana. "Yesterday morning was I brought hither, under the impression that I was coming to take up my abode in a splendid mansion situated in the midst of a vast domain; and you may conceive, sir, the horror and anguish of my feelings, when my husband, suddenly throwing off the mask—which indeed he could no longer wear—proclaimed himself Ramon de Collantes!"

"Good heavens, lady!" cried Mr. Forester, his handsome countenance colouring with indignation, and all his heart's sympathies at once enlisted in Juliana's favour: "what diabolic treachery! But pardon me—I forgot at the moment I was speaking of your husband."

"You would be justified in entertaining a very evil opinion of me indeed," quickly rejoined Juliana, "if you fancied that I could still experience the feelings of a wife towards that man. No, sir—I hate and detest the villain who has deceived me. Husband indeed! Never can I think of him as such again: nor would the law hold me bound by ties contracted under circumstances so frightfully perfidious."

"You are right, madam," answered Forester, his sympathies deepening on her behalf when he found her taking what he considered to be so proper a view of her position. "You will not deem it idle flattery if I express my belief—from your appearance, your manners, and your discourse—that you have been accustomed to move in a sphere very different from that in which you now find yourself?"

"I have indeed!" rejoined Juliana mournfully: and then she reflected for a few instants whether she should tell the English gentleman who she really was.

She feared the possibility, if not the probability, of his having heard of that dreadful exposure which took place at Saxondale Castle, and which had been rapidly circulated at the time throughout the fashionable world of England. But, on the other hand, there was the chance that the incident had never reached his ears at all; and if she were to stop short here—giving no farther explanations relative to herself, and naming not the family to which she belonged—he might naturally look with suspicion upon all the rest of her tale, and would be justified in supposing that she was playing some hypocritical part.

"Yes," she went on to observe, her mind being promptly made up to the alternative of frankness at any risk; "I did indeed move in a different sphere. Perhaps the name of Saxondale is not unfamiliar to you?"

"Unfamiliar!" cried Forester, with renewed amazement. "It is that of an English nobleman——"

"Whose sister I am" added Juliana. "Once the Hon. Miss Farefield——now a bandit's wife!"

"Good heavens! and you were Miss Farefield?" exclaimed Forester. "But you are Miss Farefield still: for, as you ere now rightly observed, the law cannot possibly sanction a marriage into which you were so treacherously inveigled. Madam," he continued, in a hurried tone—for he was much excited on Juliana's behalf—her dazzling beauty too having produced no trifling effect upon him,—"if I can be of any assistance to you, command my services. In a few days I myself shall be free; and I vow before heaven to devote my liberty to the duty of effecting your's!"

Juliana warmly expressed her acknowledgments for this assurance; and a weight was lifted from her mind—for she felt convinced, by Mr. Forester's looks, words, and manner, that he was acquainted with nothing prejudicial to her character. This indeed was the fact: for immediately after the duel, Forester had gone abroad, and had remained many months on the Continent ere returning to England. When he did revisit the British metropolis, the scandal attaching itself in divers ways to the name of Saxondale, was past and gone—or at least was lost sight of in the contemplation of fresh incidents occurring in the fashionable world. Then, too, his stay in London had been very short: and though he saw Deveril, yet our hero had in the meantime learnt that Lady Saxondale was his mother, and he would not therefore breathe a syllable against her. Mr. Forester returned to

the Continent, where he had since been residing or travelling. He therefore knew absolutely nothing prejudicial to the character of Juliana,—however poor his opinion might be of her mother in consequence of the revelations made to him by Deveril at the time of the duel.

"You have promised to befriend me," said Juliana; "and heaven knows how much I stand in need of such friendship! To whom am I indebted for this generous offer?"

"My name is Forester," was the English gentleman's response: "and being entirely my own master, I can have no difficulty in fulfilling the pledge I have given you. My time is my own; and my pecuniary means are ample."

That name of Forester at once struck Juliana as not being altogether unknown to her, though she never remembered to have seen this gentleman before. Suddenly she recollected the name in connexion with the duel between Deveril and Staunton: but still, as it was by no means an uncommon one, it did not follow that this should be the identical individual who acted as second on that occasion.

"I see," he observed with a partial smile, "that my name has struck you somewhat. But it is no reason that I should refuse to devote my services to the daughter, because at one time I befriended a gentleman who sustained some injury from the mother."

"I understand the allusion, Mr. Forester," said Juliana; "and I thank you for the delicacy of the terms in which it is couched:"—at the same time she was still assured that he knew nothing to her own prejudice. "It will not be well for us to be seen too much together. Behold you those sentinels placed all around? They are as much to keep watch upon me as upon yourself; and as the first thought of captives is always how to escape, these vile outlaws may possibly suspect that our discourse has a tendency in that direction. We shall have opportunities of meeting again: but you will not be offended if in the presence of witnesses I treat you with coldness and reserve."

"Prudence dictates that course, Miss Farefield—for by that name shall I call you:" and Forester, again lifting his hat, pursued his way in one direction, while Juliana moved off in another.

CHAPTER CLXVIII.

MR. FORESTER.

SEVERAL days passed, during which Juliana and Mr. Forester frequently met; and as not the slightest notice was taken of their proceedings—or, at least, as no syllable of remonstrance against these encounters was spoken to either—they felt assured that Ramon de Collantes, ere taking his departure, had left no instructions to prevent the civilities of such intercourse between them. They therefore prolonged their walks in each other's society—not merely to discuss plans for an escape, but likewise because they felt more and more pleasure in being together. We have already said that Juliana's beauty had produced an immediate effect upon Mr. Forester; and she could not help contrasting his handsome person and elegant manners with the coarser attributes of her husband. Besides, the circumstances under which they thus met, were tinged with a romance full well calculated to draw them thus towards each other.

But why did they discuss plans for an immediate escape, if such were practicable? why did they not wait until the return of Collantes should restore Forester to liberty, and thus leave him free to take whatsoever means circumstances should suggest for the liberation of Juliana? It was because she feared that when once her husband came back, she would be too completely in the thraldom of his vigilance to enable any one from a distance to ensure her flight: she trembled at the idea of being left behind by this friend whom accident had thrown in her way; and moreover, as above stated, she already experienced a tender feeling in his behalf. On his side, he was equally sensible of those difficulties, just enumerated, which would have to be encountered in liberating Juliana: he was smitten with her beauty; and he would gladly acquire a claim upon her by the performance of some chivalrous exploit, or the carrying out of some well-laid stratagem, in order to deliver her from the power of her bandit-husband.

"The time is passing," said Juliana, one forenoon about eight or nine days after her arrival at the tower; "and as yet nothing is decided. He may return sooner than we anticipate——"

"The time has passed so agreeably in one sense," observed Forester,—"and indeed I am now in no hurry for the return of Collantes——"

"But if he should return speedily," urged Juliana, bending upon her companion a tender look—for she comprehended full well the meaning of his words; "what will become of me? Oh! what shall I do if you were to leave me here alone? I should feel as if abandoned by my only friend!"

"Miss Farefield," responded Forester, earnestly, "I swear to you that I am incapable of abandoning you by my own free will. Come—let us seriously, and if possible for the last time, deliberate upon some plan of flight."

"Alas!" said Juliana, "I see not how it is to be effected. Sentinels watch at the entrance of the tower by night; and in the day-time it would be utter madness to attempt escape."

"I know not that it would be such utter madness," observed Forester, as an idea gradually developed itself in his mind. "If I thought that you were able to gallop a steed fearlessly——"

"Oh, indeed I am!" ejaculated Juliana, as the remembrance of her rapid flight from the cottage in company with her husband, came back to her mind. But what plan has suggested itself?"

"Supposing that we had two steeds ready saddled," said Mr. Forester, "and that watching an opportunity, we sprang upon their backs and committed ourselves to chance? There would be this risk probably—that bullets would whistle about our ears. For myself, I care not——And perhaps those sentinels posted around, would hesitate to fire at their chieftain's wife——Pardon me for reminding you of your position."

"They would fire—rest assured that they would fire!" rejoined Juliana. "Wherefore are they posted on those heights?"

"To fire upon me or my domestic, if we at-

tempted to escape—but surely not to level their deadly weapons against you!"

"And even if we agreed to run that risk," said Juliana,—"what plan have you settled in your mind as to the horses?"

"This morning, ere I joined you," replied Mr. Forester, "I passed by the stable: the door was open—and I strolled in. I had no definite motive for so doing: it was merely to see the animals. No one was there at the moment: the saddles and bridles were ready at hand—if I had chosen, I could even then have self-appropriated one of the steeds. There is a lady's saddle—I noticed it——"

"It is mine!" ejaculated Juliana; and as a wild thrill of hope shot through her heart, she added, "Would to heaven that I were seated in it now! Cheerfully would I risk the volleys that might be poured down by the fire-arms of the banditti!"

"Then, if you have the courage to dare the venture," exclaimed Forester, gazing with admiration upon the lady, "let our plan be thus settled. But we must fly alone together: I must abandon my domestic to the mercy of these fellows. Ah! an idea has struck me. The letter of credit upon the Madrid banker is for fifteen hundred pounds; and I have given Ramon de Collantes authority to receive eight hundred. I will leave behind me a note to the effect that if he suffers my domestic to depart in safety, he may receive the remainder of the amount as a ransom; and I will likewise pen a proper authority to that effect."

"What generous sacrifices you are making on my behalf!" said Juliana, with another tender look at her companion.

"Were they ten thousand times greater, they should be cheerfully made," responded Forester, who doubtless anticipated that the lady would not fail to display her gratitude to any extent which he might be bold enough to solicit.

"And the risk that you will run?" added Juliana.

"I can dare death in the hope of enjoying life in your society," was her companion's rejoinder.

She bent down her looks, and appeared for a few moments to be overwhelmed with confusion: for it was impossible to mistake the significancy of that avowal.

"And when," she asked, lifting her eyes again, "shall we put the project into execution?"

"It is impossible to fix a moment," he answered: "we must trust to the chapter of accidents. Fortunately the door of the stable is not within view of the entrance to the tower; and therefore whosoever may be lounging about in front of the edifice, would not have any cause to suspect what was being done in the stable. To-morrow morning, shortly after the breakfast hour, I will stroll forth. You can be nigh at hand. It were well perhaps that you should come without your bonnet: it will have the appearance as if you merely meant to imbibe a little fresh air, without even walking beyond the precincts of the wood. I will watch the opportunity to beckon you into the stable. If fortune favour us, all may be done in a few instants; and if we be discovered—if our plan be defeated—we can only anticipate the total privation of liberty until the return of Collantes."

"Be it all as you say," replied Juliana; "and in order that there shall be no cause for suspicion, let us to-day remain as little together as possible."

"Prudence compels me to submit," rejoined Forester: "but my own inclinations prompt the reverse."

Juliana flung upon her companion another tender look; and they separated,—he rambling in one direction, and she re-entering the tower. For the rest of that day her heart was in an almost incessant flutter, with mingled apprehension and hope. How she longed to quit that gloomy half-dilapidated tower!—and what pleasure, too, to have the handsome and agreeable Forester as the companion of her flight! She felt assured that he would not be content with merely placing her in security: he would not abandon her when having rescued her from the power of the banditti. His looks and his words had alike told her that he anticipated a recompense for the tremendous risk he was about to run on her behalf. Yes—and it was by no means likely he would sue in vain at the feet of one whose temperament was so sensuous and luxurious as that of Juliana.

The hours passed—the evening came—and she retired to rest: but sleep did not soon visit her eyes. She lay revolving in her mind all the details of the plan laid down for their flight: she could not shut out from her conviction that it was fraught with danger—that it amounted almost to the actual madness of desperation: but in its very boldness existed the hope of success. At all events, it was worth while to run the risk: she would sooner perish by one of the winged balls from a carbine, than linger out her existence in that dreadful place;—and even if she were captured and brought back, her position could scarcely be rendered much worse than it already was. Therefore her fortitude failed not; and even while envisaging all the perils to be incurred and the consequences of failure, she never for a moment hesitated in the adoption of the project.

On his side, Mr. Forester was equally resolute. He had become deeply enamoured of Juliana: her magnificent beauty had produced a strong impression on his heart; and he felt assured that he would not be compelled to sigh vainly at her feet, if fortunate enough to prove her deliverer. He was naturally of a brave and chivalrous disposition; and if the romantic circumstances in which he had encountered Juliana had exercised its influence over his feelings and sympathies, there was likewise something stirring and exciting, bold and dashing, in the feat which had to be performed to crown his triumph. Not for a moment, therefore, did he shrink from the enterprise; and he was even sanguine of success.

He rose in the morning earlier than usual; and tearing out some leaves from his pocket-book, penned the documents of which he had spoken to Juliana, and which he purposed to leave behind him. He had no better writing-paper: he dared not ask for any; and as he knew full well that the Madrid banker would not be satisfied with a mere scrap written upon with a pencil, he assured Collantes in the note addressed to him, that he would from the first town write by post to the banker,—pledging his honour as a gentleman that it should not be with any hostile purpose. Besides, his valet

would remain in the hands of the banditti as a hostage for the faithful performance of the compact thus volunteered; and all things considered, Forester felt that he could not possibly manage the proceeding better. His object of course was to ensure the safe egress of his domestic from the tower; and the means he was taking appeared to be all-sufficient for the purpose. To his valet he did not however breathe a word of his intentions: the man would not like the idea of being left behind; and on the other hand, as it was perilous enough for two persons to attempt an escape, it would be still more against the chances of success if three were to embark upon the enterprise.

Having partaken of the breakfast, which in due course was brought up to his apartment, Mr. Forester—securing about his person the papers which he had written—descended the staircase, and sauntered forth from the tower in a leisurely manner. A couple of the banditti were seated on a bench in front, eating their morning meal; and according to his usual habit, he passed them by without taking the slightest notice of them. They exchanged observations in their own native tongue, to the effect that "the Englishman need not be so haughtily proud;" and went on devouring their rations. After making a slight circuit, Forester approached the stable; and at the same instant he saw Juliana at a little distance. She had followed his advice, by descending from her chamber without her bonnet: she walked about for a little while in front of the tower; and then, as if quite in an abstracted mood, passed round to the side.

Forester had flung his looks hastily into the stable, and felt satisfied that no one was there. He beckoned to Juliana, who at once followed him into the place. Quick as thought he took down her side-saddle from the peg on which it was placed: but at the same instant a sudden noise was heard at the farther extremity of the stable; and a bandit, who had hitherto been concealed by a pile of hay against which he was seated while discussing his morning meal, emerged to their view. The fellow instantaneously suspected Forester's designs; and drawing his poniard, flew towards him.

A shriek rose up to Juliana's lips, as she thought that all was lost: but fortunately she suppressed it—for Forester, with lightning swiftness, encountered the bandit—warded off with his arm the blow which was aimed at him with the poniard—hurled the man to the ground—and placed a hand over his mouth and a knee upon his chest.

"Quick! your kerchief!" he said to Juliana. "Take the poniard"—which had fallen from the brigand's hand—"hold it over him! plunge it into his heart if he dare utter a word!"

Juliana was in a moment all life and activity. She gave Forester her kerchief—snatched up the poniard—and held the point so close to the brigand's chest that he felt it penetrating through his garment. In the twinkling of an eye the kerchief was thrust into his mouth: he was thus completely gagged.

"Cords—halters—anything to bind him!" said Forester quickly, as he now snatched the dagger from the hand of Juliana; and while he still kept the villain down with his knee upon his breast, he held the poniard over him—at the same time showing by his looks that he was resolved to use it if the slightest resistance were attempted.

His proceedings were ably and expeditiously seconded by Juliana. Two or three halters were ready close by; and with these she bound the prostrate bandit hand and foot—while Forester held the menacing poniard but an inch above his countenance. Half suffocated with the kerchief, and full of mingled rage and terror, the man presented a hideous spectacle with his convulsing features. The work was promptly done: helpless and speechless the brigand lay upon the ground; and scarcely two minutes had elapsed since the moment that Forester and Juliana entered the stable.

Now to saddle and bridle two of the steeds! Juliana's own horse was amongst them; and the quick eye of Forester showed him which was likely to be the strongest and fleetest of the rest. The process of caparisoning the two animals was speedily accomplished; and then came the most daring and difficult part of the whole transaction. Fortunately the door was just high enough for a person on horseback to pass forth by bowing the head down upon the animal's neck. This Forester's keen glance perceived in an instant; and he assisted Juliana into her saddle. Then he tossed down by the bandit's side the papers which he had written—mounted the animal which he had saddled for himself—and bade Juliana follow him close.

Stooping down so as to avoid the top of the doorway, they urged their horses forth; and with the speed of the wind they galloped down the sloping path through the vista of cork-trees. Ejaculations of rage and astonishment from the sentinels at the entrance, reached their ears, as they thus careered past like lightning-flashes: those ejaculations were quickly followed by shots—and a bullet went through Forester's hat, while another whistled close by Juliana's ear.

"Courage, my heroine!" shouted Forester: and the grove echoed the cry.

In a couple of minutes they emerged from amidst the trees; and in an instant shots were fired by the sentinels posted at a little distance in that part of the precincts of the tower.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester, as a glance showed him that Juliana was unhurt; and he felt that he himself was.

"Fear not for me, my brave deliverer!" cried Juliana; and her companion saw that she was quite equal to the enterprise.

Several more shots whistled past them, but without taking any effect. Then the sentinels who were nearest ahead were seen rushing down from the heights where they had been posted, like madmen to intercept the progress of the fugitives—but all in vain. Crack! crack! again went the carbines: still were Forester and Juliana untouched: their coursers sped like the wind—and in a few minutes they felt themselves in comparative safety. But still they relaxed not their speed: they knew full well there would be a chase; and it was not their purpose to throw away a single one of the many chances that were now in favour of their ultimate escape. Presently Forester, on looking back, perceived three or four horsemen dashing down an eminence: they were the banditti in pursuit—but he had little doubt of distancing them. On, on sped the fugitives, encouraging ejaculations constantly flying from Forester's lips, as the sparks from the flints beneath the horses' hoofs.

In about half-an-hour the fugitives looked vainly around for their pursuers; and they were now enabled to breathe their steeds for a few moments. But only for a few moments—and then their course was continued at the same whirlwind swiftness as before. Another half-hour, and they drew in the reins again. Many miles of ground had now been passed over: the countenance of each was suffused with a crimson glow. How splendidly beautiful seemed Juliana in the eyes of Forester! how handsome did he appear to the view of the lady!

It was while they were thus walking their horses for the few moments they allowed themselves as breathing-time, that the quick trampling of a steed coming from a-head, reached their ears; and a turning in the wild unbeaten way which they were pursuing, suddenly brought them full in the presence of Ramon de Collantes. A terrific ejaculation of rage burst from the lips of the robber-chief, as he in a moment recognised his wife and Forester. The Englishman would not have hesitated to stop and dare a conflict with the brigand: but Juliana, with a cry of alarm, urged her steed into all the swiftness of which it was capable—so that Forester was compelled to keep pace with her; and thus sweeping past Collantes with the speed of a vanishing dream, they were beyond his view in a moment.

So astounded was he at what he had thus seen, that he remained motionless for a few instants where he had suddenly reined in his horse: then, with another ejaculation of fury, he wheeled the animal round and dashed in pursuit. Forester and Juliana both expected that he would adopt this course; and the former exclaimed, "If it come to a death-struggle, my fair companion, you shall only fall back into the bandit captain's power when I shall be no more alive to defend you!"

Juliana was far from anxious that such a scene should take place; and she therefore compelled her courser to dash on in its wild career. They now entered upon a beaten road,—but neither having the slightest idea in which direction it led. They looked back: Ramon de Collantes was still in pursuit—he was about two hundred yards behind.

"Courage!" ejaculated Forester: and this was the cry he had been continuously sending forth, for he feared lest Juliana's strength and spirit should suddenly give way.

But as she still held gallantly on, in her precipitate flight, that apprehension wore off; and he experienced an exultant admiration for the heroism which she thus displayed. The luxuriant masses of her raven hair floated all dishevelled upon the gushing wind which was excited by their rapid progress through the air: the richest glow was upon her cheeks—fire burnt in her eyes—her lips, apart, afforded glimpses of her brilliant teeth—and she sat like an Amazon upon the steed which bore her along.

Collantes was evidently gaining ground; and all of a sudden a pistol-bullet whistled past Forester's ear.

"Good heavens!" cried Juliana; "he has fire-arms!"—and for an instant a dizziness came over her.

"Courage!" again shouted Forester. "Look! look!" he instantaneously added: "we are saved! You are beyond danger! Look! look!"

And as his beautiful companion quickly turned her eyes in the direction to which he pointed, she beheld a squadron of cavalry descending an eminence. In a few minutes the soldiers, who at the spectacle of that chase put spurs to their chargers, were close upon the roadside:—Forester and Juliana drew in their reins—they were now in the midst of protectors.

"Ramon de Collantes!" ejaculated Forester, pointing in the direction where the bandit-chief had a few instants back been pursuing them.

"Ramon de Collantes!" echoed every voice in the troop; and in a moment there was a headlong gallop in pursuit of the formidable brigand.

He had likewise caught sight of the soldiery: his steed was wheeled round in a moment—and he was in full retreat. But his horse was wearied by the chase after the fugitives; and in a short time he was overtaken. Like a lion at bay, he turned and faced his twenty opponents. A pistol was discharged at the foremost; and at the very instant the soldier, reeling back in his saddle with a mortal wound, was about to fall from his horse, Ramon de Collantes clutched at the sword which was dropping from his grasp. Then, with all the mad fury of desperation, did he strike right and left—ghastly wounds were inflicted—but it was only for a few instants that he thus was enabled valiantly to defend himself. A pistol bullet pierced his brain, stretching him lifeless in the road.

Some of the soldiers, who were about thirty in all, had remained to protect Forester and Juliana: for in the first instance they knew not how many persons might be in chase of them. One of the military spoke French; and thus, in a few rapidly uttered words from both the fugitives, he was given to understand that they had just escaped from the brigand's tower: but, as the reader may suppose, neither Forester nor Juliana let drop a syllable to betray the unpleasant fact that she was Ramon de Collantes' wife. It appeared from what the soldier said, it was well known to the civil and military authorities of Catalonia that the brigands had been wont to harbour in the dilapidated tower: but on the occasions when a military force had been sent into the neighbourhood, it was invariably assailed from the heights, and such murderous havoc was committed by the rifles of the banditti, as to compel a retreat. Now, however, that the dreaded chief himself was no more, the squadron seemed resolved to proceed to the tower—and, if possible, extirpate the band.

The person of the slain Collantes was searched: but very little coin was found about him—not more than a sum equivalent to ten or twelve pounds of English money. It therefore appeared tolerably evident that he had not been enabled to receive the ransom-money at Madrid; and this suspicion was speedily confirmed when the letter of credit, on being discovered amongst his papers, was found to have no endorsement, nor notification of any payment being made on account. As a matter of course this document was at once handed over to Mr. Forester,—who, we should add, forgot not to mention the circumstance of his valet being still a captive at the tower. He expressed his intention of proceeding to Barcelona, whither he desired that his domestic might be instructed to follow.

The soldiers departed in one direction—Forester

and Juliana in another. It cannot be supposed that the lady was very seriously afflicted by the death of her husband: on the contrary, she was rejoiced at a tragedy which so effectually severed the hated connexion. As she rode along by the side of her companion, she reflected on the course which it would be prudent for her to pursue towards him. Should she endeavour to ensnare him into matrimony? or should she consent to become his mistress? She knew full well that this latter alternative was open to her acceptance: but the accomplishment of the former was by no means so easy. She had seen enough of Forester to know that he was a thorough man of the world; and it was by no means likely that he would take as his wife the widow of a bandit, notwithstanding her really high connexions, and the treachery by which she had been inveigled into that alliance. Besides, some little time would have to elapse before he could possibly become so thoroughly infatuated as to propose matrimony; and in the interval he might learn things to her prejudice. The idea of seeking for marriage with Forester, was therefore abandoned; and Juliana made up her mind to an amour with her handsome companion.

But it must be added that she now longed to return to England. Her experiences of Continental life had been none of the most pleasant: she did not wish to settle in Spain—it was impossible for her to return to Paris, where it was known through the newspapers that her late husband, the false Count de Toledo, was none other than the celebrated Spanish bandit Ramon de Collantes—and she therefore came to the conclusion that if it were necessary for her to lead either a life of retirement, cut out from all society, or to live openly with a protector as his mistress, it might just as well be in England as elsewhere. The feelings of shame which had at first rendered her so averse to return to her native country at the same time with her mother, and which had so long kept her abroad,—were by this time crushed out of her by the various circumstances through which she had passed; and she had ceased to dread a revisit to the clime of her birth. Besides, it was now close upon the period when Edmund would be of age; and knowing the tremendous secret in respect to his birth,—a secret which she had wormed out of Madge Somers on the midnight visit which she paid to her cottage, as the reader will remember,—she was curious to ascertain whether he would be suffered to take possession of the estates without the slightest whisper of the real truth, and without opposition from any quarter. Of course, Juliana was utterly ignorant that the rightful heir—her own real and actual brother—was in existence: she was not therefore aware that there could be any opposition to Edmund's complete succession;—but, as above stated, she still felt curious and interested upon the point.

The result of her reflections, as she rode by Forester's side, was two-fold:—first, that she would abandon herself to an amour which, whether destined to prove transient or permanent, would necessarily depend upon circumstances—and secondly, that she would return to England.

Forester did not for some time interrupt Juliana's meditations, though he was very far from penetrating into their true nature. He thought that she might possibly experience a certain shock—if not actual grief—at the sudden and violent death of a man who, no matter what his character and calling were, had nevertheless been her husband. But after a while, Forester broke the silence which had followed their separation from the band of soldiers; and he said, "You are thinking, my fair heroine, of the catastrophe which has taken place?"

"And at which it were a wretched affectation on my part," she rejoined, "to say that I am afflicted."

"You speak in a proper spirit," observed Forester: "it is impossible to deplore the death of the traitor who deceived you. But meseems that we should do well to converse upon our plans. I said ere now that I should proceed to Barcelona—a resolve to which I came without consulting you, for the simple reason that I am penniless. All the ready money I had about me at the time of my capture by the brigands, passed into their hands. At Barcelona I can stop at some hotel, while I write to Madrid and procure supplies."

"Fortunately," responded Juliana, "I have some little money in my purse, which will bear our expenses on the road to Barcelona: for you see," she added with downcast eyes, "I am compelled to force myself on your companionship until we reach that city."

"Thanks for this assurance!" exclaimed Forester: and then he observed in a soft voice and a tender manner, "Wherefore should this companionship, so sweet for me, terminate at Barcelona?"

"Wherefore?" ejaculated Juliana, affecting to regard him with a look of extreme surprise. "Because it is my intention to return to England with as little delay as possible."

"And I also shall return to England," replied Forester, though the instant before he had not even thought of such a proceeding—much less made up his mind to it. "Will you permit me to escort you back to our native land? Truly, my fair heroine,—for such familiar terms must you suffer me to adopt,—you have passed through too many perilous adventures to render it agreeable for you to travel alone. Ah! my dear Juliana!" he suddenly exclaimed, "can you not understand that you have inspired me with a passion which will not permit me to leave you voluntarily?"

Juliana gave no reply; she averted her looks, and appeared to be reflecting profoundly: but Forester felt persuaded that his meaning was understood, and that his fair companion would not prove a very difficult conquest.

We will not linger upon the details of this journey which they performed together. We must however observe that at the first town they reached, Juliana purchased a bonnet and a riding-habit: for the reader will recollect in what condition she had fled from the tower. It took them three days to reach the Catalan capital,—the intermediate nights being passed in towns where they halted. But Juliana did not immediately abandon herself to the arms of her companion: she did not choose him to think his conquest too cheap, or that her virtue was too facile. The farther however they advanced on the road, the more tender grew their discourse; and when Barcelona was in sight, they came to such an understanding together, that Forester was sufficiently encouraged to propose that she should pass as his wife at the hotel where they were about to take up their abode.

And now let us suppose them arrived there. Handsome apartments were at once obtained—a sumptuous repast was served up—and inspired by exhilarating champagne, the two travellers could now look back with smiles and triumph at the perils they had passed through and the fatigues they had endured. We may even go a little farther, and depict Forester on his knees at the feet of the handsome Juliana—his arms encircling her waist—his head resting upon her bosom—while she, with her fine dark eyes swimming in a voluptuous languor, looked down upon his truly handsome countenance. He forgot that she had been a bandit's wife: he beheld only in her a woman of grandly luxurious beauty—and he was rejoiced at the conquest he had achieved.

Mr. Forester failed not to write to the banker at Madrid, to whom he explained all the circumstances under which his letter of credit had been originally presented by Ramon de Collantes. In due course he received an answer, informing him that the genuine character of the transaction had been suspected—that there had seemed something strange in the very nature of the letter which it was pretended had been written from an hotel at Figueras—and that the person representing himself as Senor Escosura was required to bring forward credible witnesses to guarantee his respectability. This was a demand with which Ramon de Collantes had evidently found it somewhat inconvenient to comply—for he did not present himself a second time to the banker, who therefore saw that he had exercised a sound discretion. To be brief, this gentleman's communication farther informed Forester that the amount represented in the letter of credit was now duly remitted to a banker at Barcelona.

In the interval the valet arrived safe and sound from the tower. The intelligence he brought may be summed up in a few words. A few hours after the escape of his master and Juliana took place, an alarm was raised, to the effect that the military were approaching. From what the valet could judge, an immediate council of war was held by the banditti—the result being a determination to make a desperate stand: for if they were to take to flight, it was but too evident they would be pursued, and in that straggling form cut to pieces. As the squadron approached, it was received with vollies of musketry, poured forth from the windows of the tower: but the soldiers bore themselves bravely—stormed the building—and succeeded in capturing those of the band who were not slain in the onslaught. The prisoners thus taken, were despatched under a proper escort to Barcelona,—and the valet took advantage of the circumstance to accompany the military. As for the females of the band, they were generously suffered by the officer in command of the squadron, to go at large. It farther appeared that, immense quantities of wood being cut down and collected for the purpose, the tower was set on fire; and though the masonry was too solid for the work of ruin to be complete, the place was nevertheless reduced to a condition that would render it unfit to harbour any of the other brigand hordes which still infested Catalonia.

The prisoners who were sent to Barcelona, suffered in due time upon the scaffold: but long ere their execution took place, Forester and Juliana, attended by the valet, arrived in England. Juliana speedily ascertained that her mother and Edmund were still residing at Saxondale House in Park Lane; and she intimated to Forester her intention of passing at least a few days with them. He was quite well enough pleased with his conquest to wish to retain her as a mistress, though he had not the slightest idea of making her his wife. He therefore besought that she would not long remain absent from him; and he promised that during the interval, he would take some agreeable residence in the neighbourhood of London, whither to bear her after her visit to Saxondale House. On her own side, Juliana was equally well pleased with Mr. Forester; and she promised to grant his request. Under these circumstances they parted: and without any previous notification of her intended visit, Juliana one fine morning made her appearance in the presence of her mother and Edmund——we may likewise add of Lord Harold Staunton: for he, though not actually domiciled at Saxondale House, nevertheless passed the greater portion of his time there.

CHAPTER CLXIX.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF EVIDENCE.

We must now once more transport the reader into Lincolnshire. About sixteen months had elapsed since the circumstances of our story rivetted attention upon Saxondale Castle and its neighbourhood: we allude to the period when Adelaide met her death, in the waters of the Trent, at the hands of her own husband. Since that era neither the guilty young man nor Lady Saxondale had revisited the Castle; and the circumstance which had created so great a sensation at the time, had almost ceased to be spoken of by the dwellers in that district.

It was about the time of Juliana's return to Saxondale House in London, that the incidents we are about to record took place in Lincolnshire. One fine day—at the beginning of April, 1846—Mr. Hawkshaw was riding out on horseback, when he encountered his friend Mr. Denison, who was likewise taking equestrian exercise. They had not previously met for some weeks, inasmuch as the old gentleman had been on a visit to the Marquis of Eagledean at Edenbridge Park in Kent, and had only returned on the day previous to which we are writing.

"My dear friend," exclaimed Hawkshaw, when they had shaken hands and exchanged the usual compliments, "I was just thinking of you as I saw you turn the angle of the road. I was wondering when you purposed to come back. What tidings bring you from Edenbridge? All our friends well and happy, as when last I saw them some fifteen or sixteen months back?"

"Ah! that was on the occasion of the four bridals," observed Denison; "and you remember that I also was of the party. Yes, they are all well and happy: indeed I know not wherefore they should be otherwise. I have been paying a perfect round of visits; and I have letters for you, Hawkshaw, pressing you to do the same. My groom

has ridden over to the Hall with them; and so you will have them on your return."

"Were I not going to Gainsborough on a little business," responded the Squire, "I would hasten home for the pleasure of reading them. But you can tell me from whom they come."

"Rather ask me," exclaimed Denison, with a smile, "from whom they do *not* come. Why, all our friends who are connected with the Marquis, have written. First of all, there is the Marquis himself, who insists that you shall pay him a visit at Edenbridge—where, by the bye, he dwells almost entirely: for, as you are aware, he has bestowed the Stamford Manor estate upon his son Francis and the beautiful Angela. I passed a couple of days at Stamford Manor, and was delighted with the perfect picture of domestic happiness which there prevails. You cannot fancy how young Paton has improved: he has quite a manly appearance, and has almost lost that boyish beauty which, so to speak, used to characterize him. He is now a handsome young man. His wife Angela is, if possible, more lovely than when we saw her led a bride to the altar and when I had the honour of giving her away. They have a beautiful boy now three months old—of whom, as you may suppose, they are dotingly fond. Frank has written, inviting you to the Manor."

"I shall assuredly accept the invitation," replied Hawkshaw,—"and that of the Marquis also. Whom else did you see?"

"Count Christoval and his splendid Countess. You know that his lordship has purchased a fine estate in the neighbourhood of Edenbridge; and that the Countess sees her father the Marquis of Engledean nearly every day. On my honour, if it were possible for her ladyship to look handsomer than she was wont to do, she does now:—matrimony has improved her. She is a splendid woman!"

"They have no children, I believe?" remarked Hawkshaw.

"None," answered Denison: "but the Count is not the less devoted to his wife on that score. They are all in all to each other, and do not seem to want any addition to their family. The tenants and peasantry on their estate speak in the highest terms of them: the Count is an excellent landlord; and the Countess is profuse, though secret and unostentatious, with her charities. You will find amongst your letters one from that excellent-hearted Spanish nobleman, inviting you to stay with him."

"Another visit that I am resolved to pay," responded Hawkshaw. "These pictures of domestic felicity quite enchant me. Pray proceed with them."

"Oh, they are not yet exhausted!" exclaimed Denison. "I visited Everton Park, which is in Hertfordshire, about twenty miles from London. You know that this belongs to Lord Everton, who married Miss Leyden."

"And a sweet pretty girl I thought her on her wedding-day," cried Hawkshaw. "Four such lovely brides were never to be seen before assembled in one room—and never will be seen again. By the way, what has become of the young lord's uncle—the old villain who kept him so long in captivity, deprived of his just rights?"

"He perished miserably of some incurable and excruciating malady, about six or eight months ago, on the Continent. From intelligence which reached the Marquis of Eagledean, it appears that two hangers-on—a man named Mark Bellamy, and a woman called Mrs. Martin—clung to him until the very last. They led him a fearful life,—spending upon themselves the greater portion of the income so generously allowed by the much-injured nephew,—and leaving the old man sometimes in want of the barest necessaries. However, he is gone to another world; and what has become of Bellamy and Mrs. Martin I have not heard."

"But I presume and hope that Lord Everton and his beautiful wife are as happy as the other couples whom you have mentioned?" said Hawkshaw.

"Equally so," responded Mr. Denison. "They have one child—a son whom they doat upon, and whom they contemplate with pride as the heir to the title and estates. Everton Park is one of the most beautiful spots in England. It was thither, as you are aware, that Frank and Elizabeth were conveyed in their childhood to see their *then* unhappy mother, the present happy Marchioness of Eagledean. Frank and the Countess of Christoval have been on a visit to the Park; and I can fancy what their feelings were when they again looked upon those scenes of which they had thus obtained a glimpse in their childhood, and which must have been associated with such mysterious memories until the secret of their birth was cleared up. Amongst your letters is one from Lord Everton—or Adolphus, as all his friends and relatives call him: it likewise contains an invitation—and as you have decided on accepting the others, you cannot refuse this."

"Nor should I think of doing so," answered Hawkshaw. "And now there remains one more couple for you to speak of."

"Mr. Deveril and Lady Florina," observed Mr. Denison. "It is just the same story with regard to them as it was in respect to the others; and if I had said at once that all the four couples at whose weddings we were present, enjoy an equal amount of felicity, I might have summed up these elaborate details in a very few words."

"Not too elaborate, my dear friend," replied Hawkshaw, "inasmuch as they are so deeply interesting. I suppose Deveril and his wife have long ago entered upon possession of the estate which the Marquis of Eagledean, Count Christoval, and Lord Everton jointly purchased for them? And that, I believe, is at no great distance from Edenbridge?"

"Not above a dozen miles," answered Denison; "and it is a sweet spot. Deveril and his wife, the charming Florina, are so happy in their married state, and with their little girl—a lovely child, by the bye, just four months old—that if there be a drawback, it is only on account of the life led by Florina's brother, Lord Harold Staunton."

"Ah!" ejaculated Hawkshaw, "I used to like that young nobleman at one time—I mean when he was staying down here at the Castle, the year before last, and when he nearly got killed by being thrown off my thorough-bred. But I am afraid he is a sad fellow."

"He is living almost openly with Lady Saxondale," responded Denison. "Nothing could be more shameless: her ladyship seems not merely lost to all sense of decency, but to hold up her head higher in her profligacy and disgrace than she ever did when standing on the pinnacle of a stainless reputation. I understand that Lord Harold Staunton is constantly at Saxondale House—that he almost lives there entirely—and that though he has a lodging somewhere in the neighbourhood—decency's last rag, as it may be called—yet that he more frequently sleeps at Saxondale House than at his own abode. Conceive what an example for a son, to be the constant companion of his own mother's acknowledged paramour!"

"It is shocking," observed Hawkshaw: then, after a little hesitation, he inquired, "Has anything more been heard of Juliana?"

"Ah! by the bye," ejaculated Denison, "I have not seen you since that dreadful exposure which was recently published in the English newspapers, translated from the French——I mean the startling discovery that Juliana's husband who passed as the Count of Toledo, was none other than a notorious Spanish bandit Ramon de Collantes."

"I also read that statement," observed Hawkshaw: "and I must say that I somewhat pitied the unfortunate young lady, notwithstanding her vile conduct towards me. Is it known what has become of her?"

"I have not heard," responded Mr. Denison. "Heavens! what a family it is! The only one who has turned out well, is Constance the Marchioness of Villebelle: and it was altogether by flying in her mother's face and bestowing her hand where her heart was already given, that she has thus prospered. Her very disobedience has therefore been the source of her good fortune,—which almost proves that to be undutiful to such a mother was to be on the safe side."

"Did you hear anything, when in London, of Lord Saxondale himself?"

"Only that he has become so dissipated as to

be well nigh past redemption, even if he had any friend who would undertake the task of reforming him. He drinks deeply; and, it is believed, never goes to bed sober. I do not suppose that his mother would care very much if he were to drink himself to death; as I fancy that in this case, if he should have attained his majority, the great bulk of the property—if not all—would still remain with her: but I do not exactly know how this is."

"It was a shocking occurrence—the death of his wife," observed Mr. Hawkshaw. "You remember that accident took me to the spot at the time of the dreadful tragedy; and the unfortunate young man was very much afflicted. By the bye, if I recollect aright, he will be of age in the course of a few days. I heard one of the tenants saying so yesterday morning; and the man was wondering whether there would be any festivities at the Castle. But it would appear that no instructions have been received to make preparations for the reception of the family; and therefore I suppose no rejoicings are to take place."

At this point of the conversation, Mr. Denison and Mr. Hawkshaw reached a spot where the road turned off towards Gainsborough in one direction, and whence there was a bye-lane leading by a circuitous route to the former gentleman's residence in another direction. Here therefore they parted; and the Squire continued his way towards the town. Finding that he was a little behind his time for the appointment which he had to keep, he turned out of the road in order to take a short cut across the fields; and in so doing, he drew near to the river's bank, at no great distance from Saxondale Castle. There had recently been a flood, caused by the heavy rains, which had made the Trent overflow and inundate the adjacent fields to a very considerable extent,—thereby causing much damage. The bailiff of the Saxondale estate had consequently deemed it necessary to heighten the bank in the particular place where the swollen river had poured its surplus upon the meadows; and several labourers were now busily engaged on this work.

As Mr. Hawkshaw drew near the place just alluded to, it struck him that he beheld some sensation amongst the labourers,—five or six of whom were grouped in a particular spot, and appeared to be occupied in the examination of something which they were passing from one to another. The moment they saw the Squire, they rushed towards him,—the foremost carrying a pistol,—while their ejaculations at once afforded a clue to the comprehension of the excitement which animated them.

"This is the thing that did the deed!" exclaimed one.

"There can be no doubt of it!—double-barrelled!" cried another.

"Who knows but what it will all be found out now?" remarked a third. "Poor creatures! it was a shocking murder!"

"Here, sir!" exclaimed the man who carried the pistol, and who now presented it to Mr. Hawkshaw: "this has just been found in the river."

But scarcely had he thus spoken, when another labourer came rushing towards the spot,—carrying in his hands something which appeared to be a bundle of clothes tied round with a cord: but the package was covered with mud, and the water was dripping out of it.

"Here!" exclaimed the individual who carried it; "I have just this moment fished this out of the Trent!"—and he also bounded towards Mr. Hawkshaw, who had reined in his horse to hear what the other men had to say.

He took the pistol, and examined it attentively. It was covered with rust; and the barrels were completely stopped up with mud—so that at the first glance it was not easy to ascertain any particulars as to the precise workmanship of the weapon. But as Hawkshaw turned it over and over in his hands, a strange and horrible suspicion gradually arose in his mind. He examined it still more closely—he drew forth his kerchief and cleansed away the dirt as well as he was able: the suspicion was strengthened—a deep gloom, blended with horror and dismay, appeared upon his countenance. Still he was unwilling to suffer that suspicion to arise into a positive conviction: he hoped to God that it might be all an error on his part! He essayed to decipher the maker's name: but the steel on which it was engraved, was too completely encrusted with rust to enable him to make it out. He rubbed away with his handkerchief—but all to no purpose.

"There can be no doubt, my good fellows," he said, at length breaking silence, "that this is the weapon which caused the death of those two unfortunate women whose mysterious murder created such a sensation in this neighbourhood the year before last. As a magistrate, I will keep possession of the fatal weapon for the present. But what have you there?" he added, turning to the man who had brought the packet.

"It is a bundle of clothes, sir," was the response.

"Open them," said Mr. Hawkshaw; "and let us see what they are:"—and still his countenance expressed mingled horror and consternation.

The labouring man placed the bundle on the grass; and kneeling down, cut the cord which held it together. First he unrolled and shook out a large cloak—and then a pair of pantaloons. In the midst were a pair of boots, a couple of stockings, and a large stone. The cloak was evidently a man's; and the stone had no doubt been placed in the bundle in order to sink it when thrown into the river. The labouring man now explained that having to wade in the water for the purpose of pursuing his employment in heightening the bank, his foot had come in contact with a soft object, which he at first fancied was a dead body: but putting down his hand, he drew up the bundle now produced. Neither he nor the other labourers seemed able to comprehend how this bundle could be in any way connected with the pistol, so far as links in the chain of evidence were concerned: they were therefore somewhat surprised when Mr. Hawkshaw, in a low deep voice, which was full of painful emotion, said, "Heaven is working out its own inscrutable ways; and the river is made to give up its secrets in order to bring the foulest of crimes home to its perpetrator."

There was a solemn pause, during which the labourers stood with their eyes wandering with an expression of awful horror from the pistol to the clothes, and back again to the pistol.

"Fold up those garments again," said Mr. Hawk-

shaw: "I will take charge of them likewise. Here! you can envelope them in my handkerchief—it is large enough for the purpose."

His orders were executed; and having distributed some money amongst the men, the Squire rode off with the bundle and the weapon. But he did not pursue his way to Gainsborough: he turned his horse's head in another direction, and rode straight, at a brisk gallop, back to his own residence. On arriving there, he gave the bundle of clothes to one of the servants, with instructions to cleanse and dry them thoroughly. He then proceeded to his own chamber, where he set himself busily to work, with oil and a piece of leather, to remove the rust from that part of the pistol where the maker's name was engraved. In about half-an-hour he succeeded in deciphering that name; and it was indeed the one which he had from the very first expected to find there. He now sent off a groom with a note to Mr. Denison, requesting an immediate visit from that gentleman, on business of the utmost importance.

It was not until a late hour in the afternoon that Mr. Denison arrived at Hawkshaw Hall; and in the meantime the clothes had been thoroughly cleansed and dried. When Mr. Denison was ushered into the parlour where the Squire received him, he was much astonished at the look of profound sorrow, mingled with consternation and horror, which his friend wore; and this feeling was enhanced when he beheld a pistol, a cloak, trousers, a pair of boots, and a couple of stockings lying upon the table.

"What has occurred, Hawkshaw?" asked the old gentleman, with a degree of nervous suspense.

"The murder of the ballet-dancer and her servant-maid," answered the Squire solemnly, "is no longer involved in mystery!"

"Indeed!" ejaculated Denison; and he glanced towards the things on the table, suspecting that they were connected with the announcement just made to him—though, with the single exception of the pistol, he did not understand how they could possibly furnish links in the chain of evidence.

"Yes," continued Hawkshaw; "it is from those articles which you are surveying, that I have gleaned the damning truth. That pistol sent the unfortunate victims to the other world; and those were the garments worn by the murderer at the time. I understand it all, Denison! But, my God! what a blow for the relatives of the wretched assassin!"

"Speak, Hawkshaw!" exclaimed Mr. Denison: "who is he? You evidently know him——"

"And you also, my dear friend," added the Squire, profoundly distressed. "He is——"

"Who?"

"Lord Harold Staunton!"

Mr. Denison staggered as if smitten violently with a hammer: he became pale as death—and sinking upon a seat, murmured, "Heavens, the poor Marquis and Florina! Lady Macdonald too ——it is frightful!"

"Frightful indeed!" said Hawkshaw: and the two friends exchanged looks of indescribable horror.

"But are you sure?" exclaimed Mr. Denison, catching at the hope that the Squire might possibly be deceived. "Are you certain that you may not be mistaken?"

"No, my dear friend—the truth is indeed but too apparent. Listen—and I will give you all requisite explanations. I comprehend everything as plainly as if the murderer's confession were made, and the hideous details were still ringing in our ears. Circumstances which wore quite another complexion at the time, now reveal themselves in their true light. But if—as there is every reason to suspect—that vile woman was herself an accomplice——"

"Who?" demanded Mr. Denison, hurriedly.

"Lady Saxondale," replied Hawkshaw. "But let me give you the promised explanations. That pistol belonged to Lord Harold Staunton. One day I went up to the room which he occupied at the Castle: he was busy preparing his fishing-tackle—and I lingered a little while to converse with him. Accident led me to examine his pistol-case, which was made to contain two—but one only was there: the other was missing. I looked at the one which was left. I remember commenting upon its workmanship; I observed the maker's name—and I remarked that it was a celebrated one. This pistol which lies before you, Denison, is the exact fellow to the one which I then saw!"

"Good heavens!—then there is no doubt!" said the old gentleman, shuddering.

"Alas! not the slightest," rejoined Hawkshaw. "And now I bethink me, there was something very singular in Staunton's manner throughout that conversation——I remember too that at one moment——Ah! it was when I observed that he was doubtless a good shot—he became so deadly pale, and his countenance suddenly wore so ghastly a look, that I grew terrified on his account. I however attributed those appearances to his recent accident: but that accident itself, Denison, I now feel convinced was an intentional one—— Yes, I comprehend it all!"

"Do you mean the accident with your thoroughbred?"

"I do. Heavens! what a deeply laid project! with what demon-like artifice was the whole plan arranged! Do you not fathom my meaning? The wretched young man threw himself from the horse in order that he might obtain a sufficient plea and excuse for keeping his own chamber. Thus was the opportunity afforded for committing the crime: while the very fact that he was believed to be stretched upon a bed of illness, was of course calculated to avert even the very possibility of suspicion from himself. On that fatal night, therefore, he must have stolen forth from the Castle——"

"But how?" inquired Denison, experiencing a fearful and likewise bewildering interest in these explanations.

"How?" echoed Hawkshaw. "Was it not proven to us, a short time after the very tragedy itself, that Staunton knew full well how to obtain secret ingress to the Castle? That tree which grows up from the river's bed, and the branches of which spread against the windows of the tapestry-chamber——"

"Ah! and where his kerchief was discovered," ejaculated Denison. "Then you think that on the fatal night of the murder, he must have stolen forth from his chamber—he must have passed out of the Castle by that window——"

"No doubt of it," replied Hawkshaw. "It is

equally clear that these were the garments which he wore on the occasion. He must have waded through the stream, under the Castle wall—his clothes were therefore wet and muddy—they would have served as evidences, or at least would have engendered strange suspicions, if seen in that state by any of the domestics. Is it not therefore clear enough, that in order to cause all traces of his dread crime to disappear, on his return to the Castle, those garments were tied up in a bundle and were doubtless thrown from one of the windows overlooking the river? The current has since carried the package higher up towards Gainsborough, notwithstanding the weight of the stone placed inside for the purpose of sinking it. As for the pistol, you yourself, Denison, suggested a long while ago—when that masquerading dress was brought to us—that the pistol should be searched for. I remember well the words you used at the time. You described the several influences under which a murderer throws away his weapon: first, that nothing criminatory may be found upon him, if suddenly stopped and searched—secondly, in the awful feeling of horror which naturally succeeds the commission of a crime—and thirdly, on being alarmed by the sound of voices or footsteps. Now, we well know that Lord Eagledean and Mr. Deveril were upon the spot almost immediately after the shots were fired; and therefore it may have been under any one of those influences — or all combined — that the wretched assassin flung his weapon into the Trent. In a word, there can be no doubt that this assassin was none other than Lord Harold Staunton, and it remains for us to decide what course we have to adopt."

Hawkshaw then explained the circumstances under which the pistol and the clothes came into his possession, and which are already known to the reader.

"That this foul murder was committed by Lord Harold Staunton," said Mr. Denison, "there can be no possible doubt after everything you have told me. That Lady Saxondale was his accomplice, is likewise to be presumed—though we are still totally in the dark as to the reason which could have prompted so fearful a crime. With these motives however we have nothing to do: it is with facts that we have to deal. What course can we take, Hawkshaw? On the one hand, if, being cognizant of a crime, we fail to give up the criminal to justice, we offend not merely against the laws, but likewise against that community of which we are members. But on the other hand, our friendship for the Marquis of Eagledean, and for all who are connected with the miserable murderer, prompts us to take some other steps. I confess that I am at a loss—I know not what counsel to proffer."

"It may be," replied Hawkshaw, "that the Marquis of Eagledean will decide, if appealed to, that the law must take its course."

"Then let that appeal be made to him," cried Denison: "and we shall both stand acquitted of any breach of friendship or any undue severity in the matter. This is the best course to be adopted; and you, my dear friend, must set off without delay to see the Marquis of Eagledean. The evidences of the crime you can bear with you; and then you will act as circumstances shall suggest."

"Yes," responded the Squire, after a few moments' reflection: "the plan you have marked out is the best."

CHAPTER CLXX.

FURTHER UNRAVELMENT OF THE TANGLED SKEIN.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon of the following day, that Mr. Hawkshaw arrived at Edenbridge Park. The Marquis and Marchioness were at home; and both were much concerned on account of the severe illness of a domestic whom they much valued. The reader will recollect a certain Mrs. Jameson, of whom mention was made at the time the Marquis went to Rhavadergwy for the purpose of presenting himself to the object of his life's love—Lady Everton at *that* time—but who had since become his wife. Mrs. Jameson had long been in her ladyship's service: she was now exceedingly old, and was stretched upon a bed of sickness from which it was feared she would never rise again. The Marquis and Marchioness were however employing all available human means to restore her. The surgeon who had been called in from the town of Edenbridge, had advised that a consultation should take place with some eminent London physician; and the Marquis had left it to the medical attendant to use his own discretion in respect to the practitioner whose aid was to be thus invoked. It happened that the Edenbridge surgeon was well acquainted with Dr. Ferney,—to whom he accordingly sent a pressing letter beseeching him to come down to the Park. Ferney, —though making it a general rule not to visit patients at any considerable distance from London, —did not consider himself very well able to refuse compliance with so urgent an appeal; and he accordingly set off for the Park. He had not been many minutes at the mansion, when Mr. Hawkshaw, arriving by the next train from London, likewise reached his destination.

The Edenbridge surgeon and Dr. Ferney were consulting together upon the invalid's case: the Marchioness was in the room of the invalid herself: the Marquis was alone in a parlour, when Mr. Hawkshaw was announced. His lordship at once saw by the Squire's manner that something of unusual importance had occurred; and Hawkshaw, with no more prefatory words than were sufficient to introduce so distressing a subject, proceeded to explain to the Marquis of Eagledean all those particulars with which the reader has been made acquainted in the previous chapter. His lordship was for some minutes overwhelmed with horror and consternation. He knew that his nephew was immersed to the very lips in all kinds of profligacies: he knew likewise that Harold had at one time plotted against his life: but he had never suspected that his miserable nephew was already a blood-stained murderer. The intelligence therefore, though judiciously prefaced and delicately announced, filled Lord Eagledean with the most horrible feelings: and indeed it was no wonder that for some minutes he was totally unable to give utterance to a word. Profoundly did the good-hearted Squire commiserate his noble friend: and he was more than ever satisfied

with himself for having adopted this course of first of all communicating with his lordship ere taking any extreme measure upon his own responsibility.

"My dear Hawkshaw," said the Marquis, at length breaking silence, but speaking in a broken and tremulous voice,—at the same time that he took the Squire's hand, and pressed it with convulsive nervousness,—"you and Denison have acted most generously. Oh, that vile young man!—— Good heavens! is it possible that he should be so deeply stained with guilt? Accursed be Lady Saxondale!—for she it is who has thus urged him on step by step from one crime to another. Ah! my dear friend, I can now give you some explanations which will help to clear up whatsoever mystery still envelops that horrible tragedy, so far as you are acquainted with it. The masquerade-dress, of the discovery of which you told me a long time ago, was worn by Lady Saxondale on a particular night, when she had an appointment with my wretched nephew,—the object of that appointment being to incite him to a duel with William Deveril. It has all along been evident that this dress fell into the hands of Emily Archer the ballet-dancer, who was the mistress of Edmund Saxondale. We may therefore surmise that she gleaned enough information on the point to be enabled to use that dress as a means of extortion or coercion with regard to Lady Saxondale. And now, Hawkshaw, you can understand wherefore her ladyship had so deep an interest in clearing her path of the unfortunate ballet-dancer. I confess there have been times, ever since you mentioned the discovery of that masquerade-dress some time back,—and which discovery proved that it was this particular costume which the women had with them in the parcel on the evening of the murder,—there have been times, I say, when distant suspicions have flitted through my mind, that Lady Saxondale might possibly have not been altogether a stranger to the foul assassination of those victims. But still there was no positive evidence to justify such a thought; and at all events I never for a moment fancied that my wretched nephew could have been implicated in the tragedy. I knew that he was stretched upon his bed at the time; and never for an instant did it occur to me that his indisposition was feigned for the purpose of enabling him to commit, with all the greater ease and security, so execrable a crime. However, it is, alas! but too apparent *now* that such has been the real truth; and I am well nigh broken-hearted at the thought."

"Your lordship indeed requires all your fortitude," said Hawkshaw, profoundly moved by the spectacle of his noble friend's affliction. "Ah! I do indeed comprehend, from all that you have just said, how it was that Lady Saxondale might have had the strongest possible motives for the perpetration—or rather the instigation of so foul a deed. But what, my lord, is to be done? As yet no exposure has taken place. The incidents which I have been relating to you, are known only to Denison and myself. Rest assured that our friendship towards yourself and all connected with you, shall over-ride every other consideration, if you so will it. Should you decide upon maintaining silence in respect to this dreadful discovery, for the sake of the amiable Florina and the kind-hearted Lady Macdonald, you have but to say the word. It will be easy for me to return into Lincolnshire and say something to those labouring men which will give them to understand that the clue which I at one moment fancied to be obtained, has not turned out to be the right one."

"Hawkshaw, whatever may occur," responded the Marquis, "I never can forget this kindness on your part, and that of my friend Denison. I scarcely feel myself justified in allowing selfish considerations to outweigh the sense of duty which we all owe to the law and to society at large. But yet there are the gravest motives——yes, the gravest——"

The Marquis stopped short, and walked abruptly towards the window, where he remained for some minutes wrapped up in the deepest thought. He envisaged all that must occur if justice should be allowed to take its course. That Lady Saxondale was not merely the accomplice but the instigatrix of the crime, was beyond the possibility of doubt. If therefore Lord Harold Staunton were arrested for the murder, *her* guilt must inevitably transpire. And then, what would be the feelings of William Deveril? Should he, after having made such noble sacrifices to save his mother from exposure, shame, and ruin,—should he be now compelled to see her held up to a world's execration for a crime even still more terrible than that from the consequences of which he had striven to shield her? Should he be forced to behold his mother plunged into a felon's gaol—dragged before a public tribunal—and ultimately sent out of the world by the hand of the executioner? Oh! the Marquis but too well knew that all this would break the generous heart of Florina's husband—that Florina herself would sink down prematurely to the grave—and that thus the crimes of the guilty would redound with horrible effect upon the heads of the innocent. These were the reflections which passed through the mind of the Marquis of Eagledean.

But there were other considerations which he had likewise to take into account. During the fourteen or fifteen months which had now elapsed since William Deveril discovered that he was in reality the son of Lady Saxondale, he had occasionally called upon her in Park Lane: she had always received him alone—she had lavished upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most affectionate; and he loved her notwithstanding all the past. He was ignorant that Lord Harold Staunton was her almost avowed paramour. Married as he was to Staunton's sister, no one whom he met—not even the most casual acquaintances—would so far outrage delicacy as to make the slightest allusion to such a circumstance. He therefore hoped and believed that his mother Lady Saxondale was now leading a quiet and respectable life; and thus he had no hesitation in visiting her from time to time, as above described. Of course Florina knew not that he ever went to Saxondale House: she had continued ignorant of the tremendous secret of his birth—a secret now known but to himself, Lady Saxondale, the Marquis of Eagledean, and Angela (Francis Paton's wife). But even supposing that the discovery which Hawkshaw had come to Edenbridge Park to announce, should be hushed up and buried in silence,—how was it possible that the Marquis of Eagledean could suffer the pure-minded and virtuous William Deveril to go on visiting his mother—a murderess?

No: there was something terrific in such a course —something outrageous to every proper sentiment —something against which every feeling of propriety revolted. Then, what was he to do? This question kept agitating in his lordship's mind, as he stood deliberating at the window. There really seemed to be only this plan:—that the veil of secrecy should still be kept drawn over the tremendous guilt of Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton, so far as exposure to the world was concerned; but that measures must be adopted to force Lady Saxondale to go abroad, and *for ever*—so that no more interviews should take place between herself and her lawfully born offspring, William Deveril. As for Staunton, he likewise must be compelled to depart to some distant clime, with a warning that his only hope of safety lay in making this self-expatriation eternal.

Such were the resolves to which the Marquis of Eagledean came: but while explaining them to Mr. Hawkshaw, he did not of course make the slightest allusion to the fact that William Deveril was Lady Saxondale's son.

"My dear friend," he said, "I accept the alternative which your noble generosity and that of Mr. Denison has left open. There are too many on whose innocent heads the effect of all this guilt would terrifically redound, to permit an exposure to take place. The veil of secrecy must not therefore be lifted from that dark tragedy. But at the same time, if we forbear from handing over the criminals to the grasp of the law, we must not suffer them to escape without some chastisement. We must force them into exile, to different parts of the world—with the warning that all this forbearance will cease if they ever set foot upon the English soil again. Come, my friend—we will depart for London: we will go together and see these guilty beings——I hope for the last time!"

Mr. Hawkshaw expressed his readiness to accompany the Marquis, and indeed to yield to his views in every particular. While refreshments were served up to the Squire, Lord Eagledean sought the Marchioness in order to inform her that business of a somewhat urgent nature, in which his friend Hawkshaw was concerned, was about to take him to London, and that he should not probably return until the following day. Meanwhile the consultation between Dr. Ferney and the Edenbridge surgeon had terminated—the physician had recommended the mode of treatment which was the best for adoption in respect to the invalid—and he was now about to take his departure. As a matter of course, the Marquis offered him a seat in his own carriage to the railway-station, which Dr. Ferney accepted. The physician thus became a follow-traveller with Lord Eagledean and Mr. Hawkshaw to London: for when the station was reached, the Marquis could not possibly express a desire to separate from Dr. Ferney's society in the train,—though in his heart he would much rather have travelled alone with Mr. Hawkshaw. In about an hour and a half the metropolis was reached; and as they were all three going to the West End, they took a vehicle at the terminus. The conversation had all the while been upon indifferent topics—so that Ferney had not the slightest idea whither his two travelling-companions were actually bound. Conduit Street, where the physician dwelt, was all in the way towards Park Lane: the driver of the vehicle therefore received orders first of all to proceed to Dr. Ferney's dwelling. In due time this destination was reached; and the physician alighted at his own door. As he was about to take leave, it occurred to him that having been most liberally treated by the Marquis in respect to the amount of the fee placed in his hand immediately after the consultation at Edenbridge Park,—he was bound for courtesy's sake to offer some little apology for what might appear a most rude neglect on his part in respect to a certain matter, but which he had his own good reasons for having hitherto so long remained silent upon.

He was standing on the curb-stone, looking into the vehicle where the Marquis and Hawkshaw remained seated. Hands had been shaken, and farewells said—when that thought to which we have just alluded, occurred to the physician. It was a most disagreeable—a most painful topic, for him to touch upon: it revived so many afflicting associations;—but still he felt himself bound, in common courtesy, to say a word upon the subject; and he summoned up all his fortitude for the purpose.

"My lord," he said, "I have not forgotten that a long, long time ago you honoured me with a call, and brought me a phial the contents of which you requested me to analyze. On three or four occasions after that, your lordship called again, to inquire whether I had made the analysis; and I feel ashamed when I reflect that I continuously answered I had not as yet found time. Your lordship suddenly ceased from calling altogether; and during the lengthy interval which has passed since then, I have often feared you might have felt offended with me. When therefore I received the letter inviting me to Edenbridge, I was gratified by the thought that your lordship was not angry——"

"No, Dr. Ferney," interrupted the Marquis of Eagledean; "I had ceased to think of the matter:" —though the real truth was that after the discovery of William Deveril's parentage, his lordship had taken no farther step to penetrate any deeper into Lady Saxondale's guilt. "I can assure you I have not been offended; and as the interest attached to that phial has passed away, you need not suffer it to remain for another moment in your thoughts. And now farewell."

"Farewell, my lord," answered Dr. Ferney. "Can I tell the driver whither he is to convey you?"

"To Saxondale House, in Park Lane," responded the Marquis.

The mention of that name, so closely following upon the discourse relative to the phial of poison, struck the physician as something not merely accidental, but superstitiously portentous. It gave a most poignant keenness to all the memories which had just been excited in his brain: the effect produced upon him was that of a sudden shock: he started—turned deadly pale—and then stood gazing in a species of ghastly consternation upon the Marquis of Eagledean.

"Heavens! are you ill, Dr. Ferney?" exclaimed the nobleman, who, as well as Hawkshaw, was astonished and affrighted by the physician's looks.

"Yes—I am ill—I—I feel——very ill," gasped Ferney, scarcely knowing what he said, and actually experiencing the most sickening sensations.

"Ill, my kind benefactor! my best of friends!" exclaimed an old man, who happened to come up to the spot at the moment, after having been for his usual little walk; and just as he was about to ascend the front door steps, he caught those words which fell from Dr. Ferney's lips. "Let me support you!"

"Never mind, Thompson—I am better now," said the physician, suddenly rallying and regaining his self-possession.

"Thompson?" ejaculated the Marquis of Eagledean, who, though the name was a common one enough, never heard it mentioned without thinking of the individual who, if he were found, could doubtless throw so much light upon William Deveril's early history. "Did you say this gentleman's name was Mr. Thompson?"

"Yes, my lord," answered Ferney, astonished at the question,—as was also Thompson himself, and even Hawkshaw too: for it certainly seemed a very strange one, the motive for putting it not being apparent.

"I am sure you will pardon me, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis, "for the seeming discourtesy of my behaviour: but I have vowed that whenever I meet any one bearing your name, and being of a certain age, I would not fail to put a particular query. I have no doubt that I shall receive from you the same answer I have already had from a dozen other Mr. Thompsons to whom I have addressed myself on the subject. But nevertheless I shall take this liberty with you."

"This is the Marquis of Eagledean—and that is his friend Mr. Hawkshaw," said Ferney to Thompson, who accordingly bowed in acknowledgment of the introductions.

"Your lordship can take no liberty," said Thompson: "and therefore whatsoever question you may have to put to me, shall be readily answered."

"It is a simple one," rejoined the Marquis, really attaching but little importance to the incident: for the antipodes are not farther from each other, than from his imagination was the hope that his query would elicit the response it was destined to meet. "Again I must ask you to excuse my freedom: indeed the question itself may savour of impertinence: but I can assure you it is through no illegitimate curiosity I ask if you were ever at any period of your life connected with theatricals?"

"Most assuredly I was, my lord," answered Thompson.

"You were?" ejaculated the Marquis, starting as if galvanized. "But one word more!" he added, with a feverish excitement which astonished those who beheld it. "Were you ever yourself the manager of a company of performers?"

"I was, my lord," rejoined Thompson.

"You were? Question begets question!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Excuse me, but were you acquainted with a family named Deveril?"

"I knew them well, my lord," was the response, given with increasing astonishment on the part of Thompson, and in which Hawkshaw and Ferney both naturally shared.

"A man and his wife—with a boy and girl," continued the Marquis, with rapid and excited utterance,—"the girl named Angela—the boy William——"

"To be sure! the very same!" ejaculated Thompson. "But the boy was not really their son——I have been questioned about this before—by a woman named Madge Somers—who was murdered, I think I heard——"

"Enough, enough, Mr. Thompson!" cried the Marquis. "Another time—to-morrow—or presently—I will come and have some conversation with you."

"Dear me, my lord!" said Thompson, more and more surprised at all that was taking place; "I hope there's nothing amiss. As for the boy I am speaking of—he must be a young man now—he had the mark of a strawberry on his shoulder——"

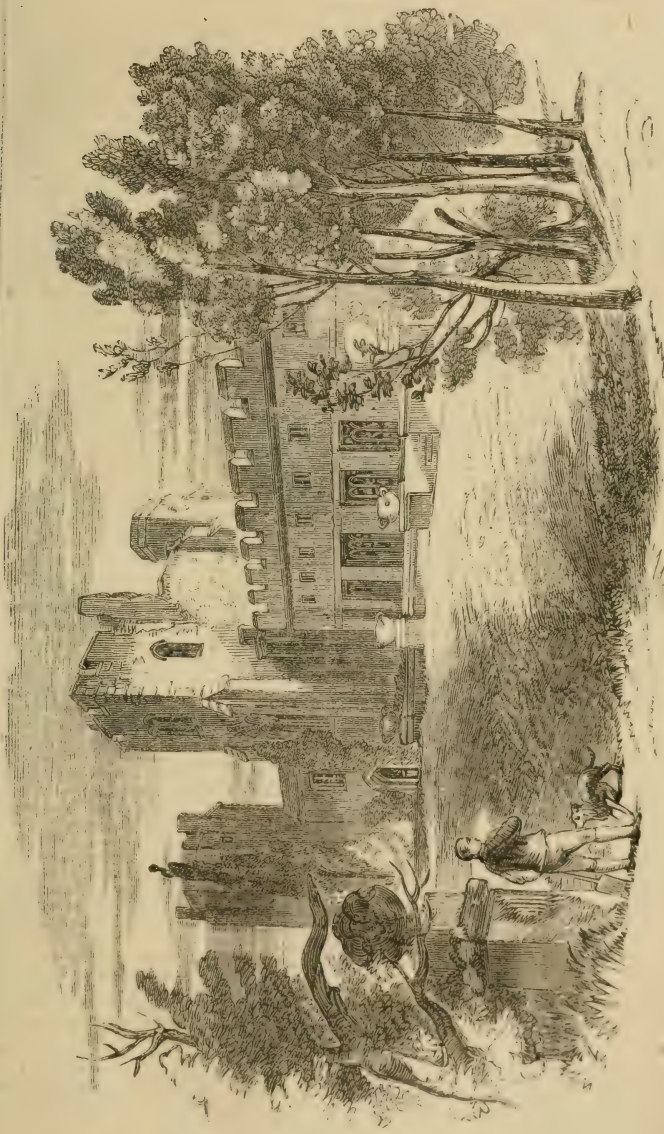
"What?" ejaculated Ferney, once more becoming deadly pale—and once more too staggering back as if seized with a sudden indisposition. "Good heavens! is everything about to transpire?"—and these words, quite involuntarily spoken, were uttered with an indescribable anguish and terror.

"I see," said the Marquis, at once convinced that Ferney himself had something important which he could communicate, and that there was likewise something more serious and significant than sudden indisposition when he had turned so ghastly pale at the mention of the name of Saxondale,—"I see that I must have some immediate conversation with you both. Hawkshaw, my dear friend, excuse me if I may now appear to be treating you with a want of confidence: but——"

"No apologies, my dear Marquis," said the Squire. "I am well aware that whatever you do is for the best."

Lord Eagledean alighted from the vehicle; and Dr. Ferney requested the Squire to enter the house, observing that whatsoever private discourse had to be held might take place in another room: but even as he spoke, the physician's manner was still strangely confused—he trembled nervously—and the ghastliness of pallor seemed to have settled itself immoveably upon his countenance. They all entered the dwelling together: Mr. Hawkshaw was shown into one room—while the Marquis of Eagledean accompanied Dr. Ferney and Thompson to another. We shall leave the Squire to the astonishment into which all these proceedings naturally flung him; and we shall see what took place between the other three.

Dr. Ferney sank, like one thoroughly exhausted both in mind and body, upon a sofa. The fortitude which had so long upheld him in the maintenance of Lady Saxondale's various secrets, appeared altogether to have given way: he looked like a man who felt that the time destined by heaven itself for the fullest revelations, had now come—as if the veil of mystery which had so long shrouded the past, was to be drawn aside by the invisible hand of Providence itself. He was thoroughly crushed and spirit-broken: remorse for the part which he had enacted in suffering himself to be made the tool of that wily woman, seized upon his soul: his sensation was that of a guilty person who feels that the hour has come when penitence must ensue and atonement be made;—and under such influences as these, the spell of that very infatuation which now for twenty-one long years had bound him to the image of Lady Saxondale, was itself well nigh broken. At all events the talisman had lost its



EASTERN SIDE OF SAXONDALE CASTLE.

hitherto marvellous power: he had a conscience on which there rested a heavy load—and he longed to ease himself thereof.

Both Thompson and the Marquis of Eagledean saw that Dr. Ferney was painfully agitated—that bitter feelings were torturing his soul; and they scarcely knew what conjecture to form as to the precise cause of so much trouble. Thompson especially,—who had lived with the physician for the last eighteen months,—was more astonished than even the Marquis: because he knew how pure and upright was the tenour of his benefactor's existence—he had looked upon him only as the slave of science—he could scarcely fancy it possible that he had ever committed a crime!

"Dr. Ferney—and you also, Mr. Thompson," said the Marquis of Eagledean, addressing them both in a solemn manner,—"the finger of heaven is visible in the incidents which have taken place within the last few minutes. It seemed destined that I was to mention the name of Saxondale in order to excite some particular feeling in *your* breast, Dr. Ferney: it seemed too, Mr. Thompson, that I was simultaneously thrown in *your* way in order to receive from your lips those statements which you evidently have it in your power to make in respect to a young gentleman who is known to the world as William Deveril."

"For my part, my lord," at once responded Thompson, "I have not the slightest interest in making any concealment—especially as I am even now ignorant of the use or value which the details I am enabled to communicate, may prove to you. Indeed, all I know is this:—that many long years ago I was with my company of performers in one of the Midland Counties. Amongst that company were a young couple of the name of Deveril,—a steady, well-behaved, respectable pair—an exception indeed to the general rule with regard to the profession which circumstances had compelled them to embrace. One day they were walking out together in the neighbourhood of some town in a Midland County—I forget exactly which at this moment—when they were struck by the appearance of an elderly gipsy woman, who had a beautiful baby in her arms. The child was about four months old; and though so sweetly pretty, looked sickly and delicate: it was moreover clad in rags. The Deverils stopped and spoke to the woman—who accosted them, indeed, to solicit alms. They saw at once that the child was not of the gipsy-race: for its complexion was perfectly fair. They felt assured it had been stolen and was now carried about in the arms of a mendicant for the purpose of exciting sympathy. They questioned the gipsy very closely; and the tale which she told, seemed too roundabout and too full of prevarications to be consistent with truth. She vowed that she had received the child from another gipsy woman who was a perfect stranger to her—that this other gipsy woman had told her she had got the child a few weeks back from a gang of tramps of her own race, but with whom she had likewise been previously unacquainted. Whether true or whether false, the narrative afforded the Deverils no clue to the discovery of the unfortunate child's parents. In their indignation at the thought that the poor little innocent might have possibly been torn away from a comfortable home, they made use of some threatening language to the elderly gipsy woman—to the effect that there were laws and authorities to compel her to give a more satisfactory account than she had done of the way in which she became possessed of that infant. Either being really alarmed—or else having had the child already long enough upon her hands—the gipsy suddenly laid the infant down on the grass by the road-side, and darted away as fast as her legs could carry her. Considering that she was an elderly person, she sped at an astonishing rate; and though Deveril pursued her, so soon as he recovered from the astonishment into which the suddenness of that proceeding had thrown him, he could not overtake her. He lost her amidst a maze of lanes leading out from the high-road where the occurrence took place, and it is therefore probable that while he was pursuing one direction, she had plunged into some bye-path in another. When he retraced his way to the spot where he had left his wife, he found her seated on the bank with the child in her arms. Your lordship can guess the sequel. The Deverils were generous-hearted though poor; and they resolved to adopt the unfortunate infant that had thus been thrown in their way. They gave it their own surname of Deveril, and the Christian name of William. A year afterwards they had a child of their own; and of such angelic beauty was she, that they called her Angela. Not for a moment however did they think of renouncing the task they had imposed upon themselves of rearing the little William,—whom indeed they loved as much as if he had in reality been their own son. They were not less intelligent and considerate than they were kind-hearted: they accordingly resolved to bring up William with the idea that he was in truth their own offspring, until he should reach the age of manhood;—and to this resolution they came in order that as he himself grew up, he should not have his sensitive feelings wounded by being compelled to regard himself as an interloper in the bosom of that poor and humble family. Besides, they did not wish the tenderest years of his life to be saddened and disturbed by the knowledge that he had been torn from his own legitimate parents;—and thus was it for the poor boy's sake that he was brought up to consider himself as the son of those who from mere charity had adopted him. I esteemed the Deverils: I was on terms of intimacy with them, apart from being their employer in the dramatic profession;—and they confided all their motives and plans to me. Now, my lord, I have told you everything with which I am acquainted on this subject: but I may repeat what I ere now said in the street, that the child who was so adopted had the tiny mark of a strawberry just in this part where the neck joins the shoulder."

Thus speaking, Mr. Thompson indicated on his own person the spot to which he alluded with regard to William Deveril. The Marquis had listened with the profoundest attention and interest:—Dr. Ferney, with his countenance buried in his hands, had not appeared to listen at all: but he nevertheless had lost not a single word of everything Thompson had been saying; and he suddenly raised his eyes at the very instant that Thompson indicated the place where the strawberry-mark on William Deveril's shoulder would be found.

"Yes, yes—it was there too that I——"

He had ejaculated those words with a startling abruptness as he sprang up to his feet: but suddenly stopping short, without finishing the sentence, he placed his hand upon his brow, and sank back again on the sofa with an expression of ineffable anguish sweeping over his features.

"Dr. Ferney," said the Marquis of Eagledean, approaching the physician, and speaking in a voice of the deepest solemnity, "whatever you have to make known, I adjure you to reveal it, in the name of that Providence which has brought about the incidents of the hour that is passing!"

"Do you, my lord," inquired the physician, "know that William Deveril—the lost child whom the poor players adopted?"

"I do," responded the Marquis. "He is married to my own niece: and what is more, I am acquainted with the real truth of his parentage."

"Ah, I understand it all! I comprehend it now!" ejaculated the miserable Ferney, literally writhing in mortal anguish. "But heaven knows that when I lent myself as that lady's instrument, I suspected not for what purpose it was to serve! My lord—and you, Mr. Thompson—you behold before you the man who perverted his scientific skill to the consummation of a fearful imposture: but I repeat——yes, solemnly I repeat, that I knew not at the time the iniquity I was assisting to consummate!"

"What mean you?" demanded the Marquis.

"I mean, my lord," responded Ferney, who felt as if some irresistible influence was now urging him to make the revelation,—"I mean that this right hand of mine formed upon the neck of him who now bears the title of Lord Saxondale, a peculiar mark—a mark of which the description was most accurately given to me—the mark of a strawberry!"

Having made this confession, Ferney once more sank down upon the sofa, a prey to feelings which may be better imagined than described. The Marquis stood transfixed in amazement: while an ejaculation expressive of a similar sentiment burst from the lips of Thompson.

"Yes—it was I who did it!" suddenly exclaimed Ferney, as he again sprang up from the sofa: and now there was a sort of maniac wildness in his looks and his manner. "Oh! truly have you observed, my lord, that the finger of heaven is visible in all this!—and I feel——yes, I feel that this is indeed the day for penitence, for atonement, and for retribution. Not another hour—not another unnecessary minute shall be wasted, ere wrong shall give place to right! Be the consequences to me what they may, I will do justice where justice ought to be done!"

It was with all the vehemence of the wildest emotions—with all the impassioned excitement of feelings painfully worked up—that the physician had given vent to that hurricane of words; and while their last echoes were still vibrating through the air, he rushed like one frenzied from the room.

"Stop, Dr. Ferney—stop! I entreat—I command you!" cried the Marquis of Eagledean, now suddenly rendered keenly alive to the dreadful consequences of exposure in respect to Lady Saxondale.

But the physician heard him not—or at least heeded him not: but precipitating himself in frantic haste down the stairs, he rushed forth from the house. The vehicle was still waiting at the door: he sprang into it—and gave a hurried direction to the driver, who at once whipped his horse; and away flew the cab in the direction of Park Lane.

The Marquis of Eagledean rushed down the stairs after the physician—but reached the threshold of the front door only in time to catch a glimpse of the vehicle as it was dashing away. For the driver, judging by Ferney's excitement, and knowing him to be a physician, conceived that some life and death affair was concerned: he accordingly failed not to ply his whip and chose not to spare his horse.

"Good heavens! my lord," said Thompson, who had followed the Marquis down to the street-door, "what will ensue? what will be the consequences?"

"My dear friend, what is all this?" cried Hawkshaw, now rushing forth from the parlour, where he had been waiting, and from the window of which he had observed the physician's egress—which had every appearance of a flight in wildest terror.

But Lord Eagledean could not answer either of his querists: he was overwhelmed with consternation at the thought that the fullest exposure must now inevitably take place,—and that all William Deveril's forbearance—all his hopes of saving his mother from shame and ruin—would in a few minutes become as naught. At that instant an unoccupied cab passed along the street; and the man who drove it, perceiving three gentlemen standing on the threshold of the hall-door, held up his hand in the usual mode of hailing for a fare.

"We may yet be in time to prevent it!" ejaculated the Marquis: and beckoning an affirmative to the cab-driver, he rushed down the steps.

Hawkshaw and Thompson followed him mechanically; and the next moment they were all three seated in the vehicle.

"Where to, gentlemen?" demanded the driver.

"To Saxondale House in Park Lane," was Lord Eagledean's hurried and excited response: then, as the vehicle drove rapidly away, he said to Hawkshaw, "My dear friend, whatever be the result of the present proceeding, it were wrong—it were ungenerous—to keep you in the dark as to its meaning: for Mr. Thompson, who is seated next to you, can tell you, even if my lips uttered it not, that William Deveril is the true and rightful Lord Saxondale!"

The Squire literally bounded upon his seat: but we must leave the Marquis to give him the few hurried explanations which the short space that was occupied in the drive to Park Lane permitted, while we transport the reader to Saxondale House itself.

CHAPTER CLXXI.

THE BIRTH-DAY.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon—about an hour previous to the scenes at Dr. Ferney's house—that several persons were assembled in the State Drawing-room at Saxondale House. These

were Lady Saxondale—Juliana—Edmund—Lord Harold Staunton—Lord Petersfield—and Messrs. Marlow and Malton.

This was the day on which, according to the baptismal certificate, the heir of Saxondale attained his twenty-first year!

It was therefore a day of business,—to be succeeded with festivities in the evening. The table in the State Drawing-room where the assemblage had gathered, was covered with parchments, deeds, and documents: the time had arrived when the guardianship of Lord Petersfield and Marlow and Malton was to terminate—when the requisite releases were to be signed by Edmund—and when the transfers of the Saxondale property were to be duly made by the trustees.

We must glance at the demeanour and bearing of those present on the occasion. First of all, Lady Saxondale, looking eminently handsome, wore upon her countenance a certain expression of satisfaction,—which Petersfield and the lawyers regarded as a becoming maternal pride in respect to the offspring who was now entering upon the enjoyment of his estates. The reader however will scarcely require to be informed, that this expression on her ladyship's features was rather one of triumph at the success of all her deeply laid schemes: for she had not the slightest fear that her own lawful and legitimate offspring—William Deveril—would breathe a syllable or raise a finger to prevent the consummation of the monstrous fraud by which he was excluded from his rights. Secondly, Edmund himself was in a fever of ecstatic joy: his dark crime was for the moment forgotten; and in the secret depths of his heart, he was thinking to himself that he should speedily again shake off the yoke which his mother had ever since the date of that foul deed succeeded in re-imposing upon him. Thirdly, Juliana looked on with an outward calmness—but with an inward exultation: for she had resolved that as the price of keeping the tremendous secret with which she was acquainted, she would extort from her mother a concession of a handsome income, which would enable her to prosecute her own pleasures after her own independent fashion. Fourthly, Lord Harold Staunton—who, as the reader is aware, knew nothing at all of the fearful deception which was being practised—had his own pleasurable feelings: for what with being Lady Saxondale's paramour, and having, as he fancied, obtained immense influence over Edmund, he saw every opportunity of continuing a life of luxurious indolence. Fifthly, Lord Petersfield looked so immensely pompous, and at the same time so awfully grave, that he seemed the very embodiment of the proudest diplomatic mystery; and if any one at the moment had dared to ask him point-blank whether he were really Lord Petersfield or not, he would doubtless have considered it his duty to fence with the question for at least half-an-hour ere he answered it. Sixthly, Mr. Marlow was all excitement and bustle—unfolding one paper and rolling up another—making a correction here, and a memorandum there—and, in short, appearing as brisk as if he were full of quicksilver. Seventhly, his partner Mr. Malton had all the sedate business-like demeanour of a shrewd and intelligent practitioner.

These seven personages were, as we have said, gathered round the table in the State Drawing-room at about four o'clock on the day of which we are writing. Business was now to be proceeded with—to be followed by a sumptuous banquet, which was ordered for seven o'clock. The attainment of a majority under such circumstances, where immense estates and revenues were concerned, was a matter of such importance as to absorb every other feeling on the part of such men as Petersfield and the lawyers. Thus, though they knew full well that Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton were much more intimate than they ought to be—though they likewise knew that Juliana's career had been far from the purest and most creditable—and though, in addition to these circumstances, they were equally aware that Edmund himself was a dissipated profligate—they did not consider the present moment to be the time to bestow cold looks, make pointed allusions, or display any particular fastidiousness on their own parts. In a word, they regarded it as a day on which the past might be put aside, for the present, and when every indulgence should be shown and every friendly feeling ought to prevail. Under these circumstances was it that those seven persons were assembled.

But just as Mr. Malton was beginning to read over the releases which Edmund had to sign, a domestic entered the room, and presented a card to Lady Saxondale—without however uttering a word. For a moment—but only for a moment—she turned pale and trembled: yet so quickly was her self-possession regained, that not a soul present observed that she had even for that single instant been thus shaken.

"I will come immediately," she said to the domestic—who bowed and retired: then addressing herself to the company, she observed with a bland smile, "It is a visitor of no consequence—but nevertheless one whom I must see for a few minutes. You can proceed, Mr. Marlow, with the reading of the release: as, for my part, I am already acquainted with its contents."

She then left the room. But scarcely had the door closed behind her—scarcely did she find herself on the landing—when she was seized with a recurrence of that tremor which was so transient in the presence of the company; and as a frightful idea swept like a barbed arrow through her brain, she murmured to herself, "My God! can he have thought better of it? can he have repented of the sacrifice he had promised to make? can he mean to assert his rights? No, no—it is impossible! He loves me too well to plunge me into ruin! I have too much influence over him for that! A little cajolery—plenty of caresses—a more than usual amount of endearments—and he will be docile—he will be submissive!"

Thus buoying herself up with hope—though nevertheless not without some degree of painful suspense and poignant apprehension—Lady Saxondale repaired to the apartment to which the visitor had been shown. This visitor was none other than William Deveril. Unaware that the Marquis of Eagledean had so suddenly come up to London, our hero—having some business in the metropolis—had journeyed thither: and having terminated it sooner than he had expected, he thought that he would pay his mother a visit of a few minutes ere hastening off to the railway-station to return to his own abode. We must

add that he was totally ignorant that this was the birthday of Saxondale's heir—*his own birthday, by rights*—but the benefits of which were to all appearances to be reaped by another!

Lady Saxondale entered, as we said, the apartment to which William Deveril had been shown; and with all the generous feelings of his heart—with all the enthusiastic fervour of a filial love which could even blind itself to a mother's faults—he rushed into her arms. In that gush of tenderness was the significant proof that she was safe, and that it was merely a casual visit which he had thus paid her—a visit inspired by no motive hostile to her own schemes.

"My dearest boy!" she said, clasping him to her bosom, and lavishing upon him caresses which appeared the tenderest and the most fervid: "I am delighted to see you again! Would that it were possible, my beloved William,"—for by this Christian name she was accustomed to call him,—"we could meet oftener! But for many reasons you know it is impossible."

"Alas! I know it, dearest mother," responded our hero: "and you will admit that I obey the dictates of my own feelings as little as possible. If I come to you once a month, it is the very outside——"

"You are indeed as prudent, dearest boy, as you are kind-hearted and generous towards your affectionate mother:"—and as she thus spoke, the wily woman pressed him again to her bosom. "I am so sorry, dearest William," she went on to observe, "that I have some persons on business with me at this moment: and I shall not be able to remain very long with you——"

"Never, my beloved mother," quickly responded our hero, "will I interfere with your proceedings! I will therefore depart at once—contented and happy to have embraced you; and the next time I call, perhaps you will have a little more time to devote to me."

"Rest assured that it shall be so," answered her ladyship. "But yet you shall not leave me in such a hurry. You know how I love you; and I cannot find it in my heart to hasten you away. Yes, dearest William—I love you all the more on account of your noble conduct towards me!"

"Oh! how often have I conjured you" exclaimed our hero, "not to express the slightest syllable of thanks on that account! It is a duty which I owe you; and being such, it is cheerfully performed."

"Dearest boy!" murmured Lady Saxondale, gazing upon him with every appearance of mingled tenderness and admiration. "And you are sure, William, that you have never once repented of the decision to which you came—that there have not been moments when you have regretted the sacrifice you have made——"

"Never once, mother!" cried Deveril emphatically. "No—not for a single moment!"

"And never," continued Lady Saxondale, "have you breathed in the ear of your wife——"

"No, never—not a syllable! That is the only secret which I have kept from Florina. In every other respect my heart is revealed to her as if my breast itself were transparent. Oh, dearest mother! if you entertain the slightest misgiving on my account, banish it from your mind—dismiss it from your thoughts! You may confide in my good faith as implicitly as if it were an angel from heaven that gave you the assurance!"

"And all the fondest love which a mother can bear for her son, is your's as your reward," murmured Lady Saxondale, as she bestowed upon him a parting embrace.

"Farewell, dearest mother," responded Deveril. "In a month we shall meet again."

They then separated,—Lady Saxondale returning with exultant heart to the State Drawing-room—and our hero descending the stairs to issue forth from the mansion. As he crossed the threshold of the front-door, he bade the hall-porter good afternoon: and that domestic sententiously replied, "Good afternoon, Mr. Deveril."

"Deveril?" ejaculated a middle-aged gentleman who, at the instant, having alighted from a vehicle, was hurrying up the steps. "Deveril! was that the name I heard mentioned?"—and he stopped short, surveying our hero rapidly, and also in a wildly excited manner.

"My name is Deveril, sir," was the response, courteously given—but likewise with some degree of astonishment at the singular behaviour of his interrogator.

"Yes—it must be!—the very age—the likeness too!" said that individual, in a quick musing tone to himself. "A word with you, if you please, sir—a word with you! It is of the highest importance! And yet, as you are here—at Saxondale House—you must know——But no matter! A word with you!"

"With me?" exclaimed our hero, in increasing astonishment.

"Yes—with you! Are you not William Deveril? I am Dr. Ferney—a physician whose name perhaps may not be altogether unknown to you, I have just seen the Marquis of Eagledean—and Mr. Hawkshaw——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Deveril: "is Mr. Hawkshaw in London?"

"He is. But there is another thing," Ferney went on to say, in the same hurried and excited manner: "a certain Mr. Thompson——"

"Thompson!" echoed Deveril, an intense interest now blending with his amazement.

"Yes! But we cannot converse here. Come with me!"—then addressing himself to the hall-porter, the physician said, "Have the kindness to show us to an apartment where we may converse for a few minutes."

The domestic hesitated not to comply with the command, inasmuch as the name of the eminent Ferney was well known to him: and moreover, Deveril himself was an occasional visitor at the mansion. He had caught, too, some portion of the hurried and ejaculatory exchange of observations which had just passed upon the door-steps; and without understanding anything in its true sense, he saw enough to be convinced that something of importance was progressing. He therefore conducted the physician and our hero into a parlour opening from the hall: but he paused to inquire of the former whether he should announce his presence to her ladyship?

"No—not yet!—do not disturb her for the moment!" ejaculated Ferney: and he seemed all in a nervous trepidation until the domestic retired, closing the door behind him: then, still with excited utterance, he said abruptly, "What are

you doing here? Tell me quick!—tell me, I beseech you!"

"I came to call upon Lady Saxondale," was our hero's response: and he could not feel offended by the physician's questioning: on the contrary, he himself was now excited and agitated at all that was passing.

"Lady Saxondale! Wherefore speak of her thus coldly?" exclaimed Ferney. "But you do *not* know——it is evident you do not! You are completely in the dark! Ah! it is for me to be the first to enlighten you!"

"Good heavens, what mean you?" cried Deveril, now trembling with apprehension lest the secret which but a few minutes back he had so solemnly pledged himself to his mother to keep, should have become known to the physician: then, as he recollected that the name of Thompson was mentioned on the door-steps, he felt assured that his conjecture must be the true one.

"What do I mean?" ejaculated the excited Ferney. "Here! strip off your coat—your waistcoat—unfasten your shirt——"

"Oh, my poor mother!" murmured Deveril, as he caught the physician violently by both arms, and forced him into a chair: for it was in a sort of frenzy that Ferney had begun almost to tear our hero's raiment from his back. "Silence! compose yourself—I conjure you to compose yourself! Whatever you may know, sir, must be kept inviolable!"

"Heavens! is it possible," cried Ferney, starting up in a still wilder excitement than before, "that you yourself *do* know everything, and that you have submitted thus to be defrauded of your rights?"

"Dr. Ferney," answered our hero, "on my knees do I supplicate your forbearance—your mercy towards my——towards Lady Saxondale!"

"Oh, speak out the words fully! call her *your mother!*" cried the physician.

"No, no—not aloud! the very walls have ears!" murmured Deveril, with tremor in his accents, and an almost frenzied affright in his looks: but as the physician was bounding towards the door, he sprang up from his knees—flew after him—and literally hurled him back. "Sir!" he exclaimed, with all the vehemence of passion, "it is not *your* secret which you seem so madly inclined to betray! it is *mine*—and I invoke curses upon your head if you dare reveal it!"

"Ah! young man," cried the physician, growing all the more rabid in his excitement in proportion as our hero's frenzy increased,—"you may indeed invoke curses upon me: for it is I—wretch, villain that I have been—who have proved the means of depriving you of your birth-right! But wrong shall be done you no more—everything shall be proclaimed in the face of day!"

"For God's sake, spare me—spare my mother!" cried Deveril, again falling upon his knees, and clasping his hands wildly, as his arms were outstretched towards the physician.

But Ferney heeded him not: and availing himself of the opportunity to rush to the door, he flung it open—he dashed into the hall, demanding of a footman, "Where is your mistress? Where, I ask?"—and he stamped his foot with impatience.

"In the drawing-room above, sir," responded the astounded lacquey. "But her ladyship——"

"No matter!" cried the physician: and he rushed up the stairs.

William Deveril, in a state bordering upon frenzy—maddened at the thought of the shame, the ruin, the total destruction, which must overtake his mother—darted in pursuit of Dr. Ferney; while the domestic and the hall-porter, who beheld this singular scene, exchanged looks of perfect bewilderment, being utterly at a loss what to think.

But we must now return to the State Drawing-room, to which Lady Saxondale went back after her interview with her son. She entered with the calm composure of one who had merely received a casual visitor, of whom she had succeeded in getting rid after some twenty minutes' conversation. She resumed her seat at the table,—motioning Mr. Marlow to continue the reading of the releases, to the end of which he had not yet got, as they were very long. He had paused for an instant out of respect for her ladyship, when she thus reappeared: but on that sign from her, he continued the recital. Volatile, quick, and bustling, as his habits were,—he nevertheless could settle himself down on occasions into comparative sedateness; and he was now reading the details of the documents in that slow and deliberate manner which was best calculated to render the contents effective and impressive. In about ten minutes more after Lady Saxondale's return to the room, the reading was brought to an end; and then Mr. Marlow, addressing Edmund, spoke in the following manner:—

"Your lordship has heard all the details of these releases, which you are requested to sign not merely in acquittal of the trust which has been exercised on your behalf by my Lord Petersfield and the firm to which I have the honour to belong—but likewise in evidence of satisfaction at the mode in which that trust has been carried out. Here are the deeds which are about to be handed over to your lordship, and which will place you in full enjoyment of the domains and revenues whereunto you are entitled. Your lordship will have the goodness to sign these releases; and those papers are then your's."

Edmund took the pen which the solicitor presented to him, and was about to write the name of "SAXONDALE" on the parchment whose contents had just been read,—when Lord Petersfield, thinking it a proper opportunity for him to make a set speech, waved his hand in a dignified manner for a pause to ensue ere the business should be thus terminated.

"Permit me," he said, looking awfully solemn, and speaking with all the gravity of the veteran diplomatist,—"permit me as the friend of your long deceased father—as the friend of your family for many, many years—as one who has beholden you grow up from infancy to that manhood which you have now attained——And I think I may venture to assert that it is really you yourself whose growth I have thus studied; and not another's—permit me, I say, to congratulate you on the attainment of your majority—a majority which, I believe, I may add without any fear of contradiction, places you in the possession of your estates. I am not accustomed to make hurried assertions—I am not in the habit of speaking precipitately or rashly—but I think I may venture to affirm that you *are* the possessor of those estates—your iden-

tity is beyond dispute—and I am congratulating the legitimate, the lawful, the unmistakable—shall I say the well-proven-to-be heir of Saxondale?"

"No—it is false!" ejaculated a wildly speaking voice, as the door was dashed open; and Dr. Ferney, with the air of a lunatic just escaped from Bedlam, burst into the room, followed by William Deveril.

Lady Saxondale started up as if suddenly galvanized: a wild scream thrilled from her lips—and she sank senseless upon the floor. William Deveril, who had stopped short on beholding that assemblage of persons, sprang forward to catch his mother: but he was too late to prevent her from falling—and almost frantic, he snatched her up in his arms and conveyed her to a sofa.

At the same instant other hurried footsteps were heard upon the landing; and the Marquis of Eagledean, Mr. Hawkshaw, and Mr. Thompson now made their appearance upon the scene.

CHAPTER CLXXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR OF SAXONDALE.

No words in the English language—nor in any known tongue—have power to convey even a faint idea of the excitement and confusion which were thus suddenly produced in that apartment. Lord Petersfield had merely dogmatized in his wonted sententious manner, without the slightest possible suspicion that while he was expatiating on Edmund's identity as the veritable heir of Saxondale, he was treading on the most ticklish ground, and that by a coincidence he was sending forth verbiage which admitted of so marked and abrupt a refutation. He sat aghast in his chair:—Malton, the sedate partner, looked astounded—Marlow, the volatile one, was all feverish excitement. Juliana comprehended that all was lost; and when Hawkshaw made his appearance, she abruptly fled from the room. Staunton was seized with an inconceivable bewilderment, which quickly became blended with a strong feeling of terror on beholding his uncle the Marquis of Eagledean. As for Edmund, he was stricken with amazement: but the next moment he felt assured that it could be nothing beyond a madman's freak. Of course he knew Ferney well,—having been a captive at the physician's house: but it was natural enough for him to conjecture that the doctor, instead of being fitted to take charge of lunatics, had become a lunatic himself.

Lady Saxondale had fainted, as we have already said: her son had borne her to a sofa—and sustaining her in his arms, was giving vent to ejaculations half frantic, half pathetic.

"Mother, dearest mother——No, no—I mean Lady Saxondale—open your eyes! Do look up at me! No harm shall befall you! It is not I who have done it—I will contradict everything that is said——mother——your ladyship——dearest——no, Lady Saxondale!——O God, I am mad! I am frenzied!"

"Ring for her ladyship's maids," exclaimed the volatile Marlow: and he was bounding towards the bell-pull, when the Marquis of Eagledean called him back.

"No, sir!" said his lordship: "you had better not! Enhance not this terrible exposure. Shut the door, Hawkshaw. Water!—let us throw water on her ladyship's countenance!"

"Oh, my lord!" cried Deveril, flinging a look of wild reproach upon the Marquis; "what have you done?"

"It is not I who have done it!" exclaimed Lord Eagledean. "Heaven itself ordained this to be the day of revelation, atonement, and retribution—the day on which injustice is to be proclaimed and justice done—the day on which imposture is to be unmasked and truth developed—the day, in fine, on which the rightful heir of Saxondale is to take possession of his own: and that heir is he who has hitherto borne the name of William Deveril!"

While giving utterance to these last words, Lord Eagledean swept his looks around upon all present; and the effect was startling indeed for those who were not hitherto in the secret. Lord Petersfield was more than ever struck with the conviction that one can never be sure of anything in this world; and he even began to tremble lest the next announcement to be made should be to the effect that he himself was not Lord Petersfield at all—that he was quite another person—John Noakes or Tom Stiles, as the case might be. Marlow poured forth a perfect volley of questions: Malton looked perfectly confounded. Lord Harold Staunton knew his uncle too well not to feel assured that he was speaking the truth; and moreover the startling announcement which had been made, cleared up in an instant the *one* mystery which he knew Lady Saxondale had always kept inviolably concealed from him. As for Edmund himself,—though we mention him last, heaven knows he was not the least interested in these strange and almost frightful proceedings!—*he* was now seized with the most torturing misgivings: he turned pale as death, and quivered like an aspen leaf as he lay back in his chair.

But while we are thus describing the effects produced by the Marquis of Eagledean's announcement, this nobleman himself had seized on a decanter of water which stood on a side-table where wine and cake had been placed; and he hastened to sprinkle some of it on Lady Saxondale's countenance. That countenance was marble-pale; and even before the water was thus sprinkled upon it, there were crystal drops there. They were tears—but not tears that had flowed from her own eyes: they had fallen from the lashes of her son as he bent in frenzy over her. She began to revive; and now our hero, utterly overcome by his own highly wrought—indeed, excruciating feelings—himself fell down in a dead swoon. Hawkshaw and Dr. Ferney hastened to bear him to another sofa in that spacious drawing-room; and the physician now literally tore his garments off his back, —the Squire mechanically assisting, under the impression that it was a necessary process to bring him back to life.

"There!" cried Ferney in a wild excited tone and with vehement gestures: "there is the mark—the proof of his birth!"

"Ah! but I," ejaculated Edmund, springing up to his feet from the chair in which he had lain back, "have also a mark like that!"

"I know it, sir!" was Ferney's quick response: "but this right hand of mine—wretch, villain that

I am!—this right hand of mine, sir," he repeated still more vehemently than before, "made that mark upon your shoulder!"

Ejaculations of astonishment burst from the lips of Lord Petersfield, the two solicitors, and Lord Harold Staunton: a wild cry of rage thrilled from the lips of Edmund; and they all gathered round the sofa on which the real Lord Saxondale was stretched in his deep swoon. Those ejaculations were repeated, as their eyes concentrated their glances upon that mark—a mark not so large as a sixpence, but perfectly defining the semblance of a strawberry. Then all those looks, being suddenly withdrawn from that focus, exchanged glances of wonderment with each other.

"My lord, spare me! I conjure you to spare me!" a voice was now heard to speak—a voice the low deep accents of which were filled with a tremendous anguish—a voice, in short, so changed from its natural tone that those on whose ears it fell, had to glance in the direction whence it came in order to assure themselves that it was really the voice of Lady Saxondale.

And her's in sooth it was. She had now recovered: she was sitting up on the sofa, the picture of blank dismay—the personification of indescribable despair.

"Madam," responded the Marquis of Eagledean, to whom that doleful—Oh! so doleful appeal was made; "it were the very refinement of cruelty to address you in words which should add to the tortures you now experience. I therefore hesitate not to proclaim that as much leniency shall be shown you as under circumstances can be manifested—not however so much for your own sake, as for that of your admirable son who would have made every sacrifice for you!"

"Tell me at once," cried Edmund, flying towards Lady Saxondale with a fierce—a maddened—a diabolic expression of countenance,—"tell me, is this true? Am I not your son?"—and he seized her forcibly by the wrist, literally shaking her in the furious convulsion of his rage.

Her ladyship, though crushed down to the very earth—though trampled upon, as it were, by the iron heel of the sternest calamity—though overwhelmed with the ruins of that fabric of iniquity which had suddenly crumbled in upon her,—nevertheless at the instant experienced one single feeling of satisfaction,—which was that if she herself were utterly discomfited, the same fate had at least overtaken the ill-conditioned wretch whom she had hitherto called her son—the viper whom she had nourished to sting her! For a moment her large dark eyes glistened with that expression of malignant satisfaction as she forcibly tore her arm away from his grasp; and she was about to give utterance to some bitter retort, when the horrifying idea flashed to her mind that if she goaded Edmund to desperation, he might—in a paroxysm of rage and vindictiveness—or in the cruel bewilderment of his feelings, proclaim the murder of Adelaide, and that Lady Saxondale was the instigatrix! She accordingly exercised a sudden control over herself; and assuming an air of the profoundest commiseration, said, "Poor boy! it will be better that you and I should have a few minutes' discourse together."

The Marquis of Eagledean knew nothing particularly to the detriment of Edmund, beyond the profligacy of his morals; and the generous noble man could not help experiencing a certain degree of compassion for the young man who was thus all in a moment hurled from the pinnacle of rank and wealth into the depth of obscurity and dependence. With this sympathetic feeling, he naturally considered it best that whatsoever explanations had to be given between that woman who had brought up another person's child as her own, and that young man on whom had come, like a thunderbolt, the tremendious announcement that he was *not* the son of her whom he had hitherto regarded as his mother—the Marquis thought, we say, that such explanations ought to take place between them alone together.

He therefore said, "Sir, compose your feelings as well as you are able—trust to the generosity of those who perhaps entertain some little sympathy on your behalf—and I think that I may safely promise you shall not be left altogether uncared for. Lady Saxondale, take him to another room: speak to him there—do, as indeed you ought, your best to comfort and console him; and in the meantime I will consult with those who are here upon the course which is to be adopted, so that for your son's sake,"—and he glanced towards the sofa where the real Lord Saxondale was only just beginning to recover from his deep swoon,—"it shall be measured with as much regard to your feelings as the circumstances will permit."

Edmund,—for so we had better continue to call him, though that was not really the Christian name which he had received at his birth from his mother, Madge Somers,—had not spoken another word after Lady Saxondale had addressed him with that air of seeming compassion. Pale as a ghost, he had stood riveted to the spot—no longer able to shut his eyes to the conviction that everything was indeed at an end so far as rank and riches were associated with himself. The blow was fearful—the shock tremendous: any other mind would probably have gone stark staring mad, and shrieked out in the wildness of delirium. But it was not so with Edmund Somers: he seemed to be reduced to an unnatural and incomprehensible state of being: he gasped for breath—he looked as if gazing upon a horrible spectre that had suddenly sprung up before him; and yet the light that shone in the depths of his eyes, was of a sinister and undefinable description.

"Come, Edmund," said Lady Saxondale, still in that low plaintive voice with which she had previously addressed him: "come—let us in all things follow the counsel of the Marquis of Eagledean: for to him have we both now to look for much that will influence our positions - indeed the future of our lives!"

She took the young man's hand; and he suffered himself mechanically to be led from the room. Not a word was spoken by those who remained behind, as they thus went forth: Dr. Ferney, not daring to throw another glance upon Lady Saxondale, was intent upon recovering our young hero from his swoon. Her ladyship conducted Edmund to her own boudoir,—this being an apartment remote from that which they had just left, and having double doors that would prevent the possibility of anything which might pass between them being caught up by an eavesdropper: for she well knew that the domestics

MARY-ANNE, THE LADY'S-MAID.

must already suspect that something strange was going on—and she likewise apprehended that the scene with Edmund Somers would be far from an agreeable one. She had however a fearful interest in soothing and tranquilizing him, if possible: she had to prevent him, as already hinted, from revealing in rage or despair—in bewilderment or in madness—the tremendous secret connected with the death of Adelaide.

Edmund had suffered himself to be led up to that boudoir: he had walked like an animated statue, neither looking to the right nor to the left: his hand merely lay in that of Lady Saxondale, but clasped it not. Yet all the while there was still that sinister and incomprehensible light playing in the depths of his eyes.

They were now in the boudoir. Her ladyship had taken the precaution to lock the outer door, and to close securely the inner one, which was covered with scarlet cloth. She made Edmund sit down upon a chair: she took another opposite to him; and now their eyes met. That woman who had reared him as her son, looked him in the face: that young man who had hitherto believed her to be his mother, looked also in the face the woman who was *not* his mother! She beheld the ominous light in his eyes; and for an instant a cold shudder passed through her form—that form which within the last ten minutes had been racked and rent, lacerated and tortured, agonized and crucified, with the most fearful feelings that could possibly be diffused through a human frame from the sources of the soul.

"Edmund," she said, still preserving that low plaintiveness of tone; and now forcing herself to become almost a suppliant at his very feet—though in her heart she longed to call him "viper," as she had often before done, and give way to a wild maniac joy at the thought that in her own fall she had dragged down along with her the

youth who had so frequently rebelled against her; —"Edmund," she said, "for heaven's sake look not thus upon me! It is a fearful moment for us both: but if you suffer, I suffer likewise. You ought not to be irritated against me: it is not my fault if these plans—the work, the labour, and the toil of long, long years—have all exploded in an instant. Through me you would have had rank and riches: to me you would have been indebted for the proudest of positions. Think of all I have undergone for your sake—the warrings by day, the agonies by night——"

"Enough of this!" suddenly ejaculated the young man, springing up to his feet. "Tell me," he demanded in a hoarse husky voice, "whose son I really am."

"Do not ask me!" responded Lady Saxondale, in an imploring voice: for she was frightened by his looks and his manner. "It is needless to enter into particulars——"

"Needless? No!" interrupted Edmund, with a sort of dogged resoluteness, which afforded still farther proof that he was in a most unnatural state of mind. "Tell me, I repeat, whose son I am! If some beggar's brat when you adopted me—or bought me—or stole me, whichever it were,—at all events let me know the worst. Tell me then who I am! There is something horrible and hideous to be ignorant of one's parentage. Tell me who I am. Think not that by lifting the veil and making me aware that I owe my existence to some low-born wretches, you can inflict a sterner blow than that which has already struck me. Tell me, I say, who I am!"—and he spoke in a manner such as never he had spoken in before.

"Edmund! Edmund!" murmured Lady Saxondale, not knowing what to think—whether he were in that state of ominously unnatural calm which precedes the sudden explosion of the volcano—or whether the force of circumstances had made his mind put forth powers which it had never hitherto developed, but which were now coming to his aid to enable him to meet his present position with the true courage of a man;—"Edmund Edmund, press me not upon this point, I conjure you! Let us talk upon other subjects! I will not abandon you—my own son will give me riches—you shall share them——"

"The name of my parents!" interrupted Edmund, still in that hoarse thick voice, but with a more lurid flashing of the sinister eyes. "What was it?"

"Your father died before you were born," answered Lady Saxondale, terrified into giving this response. "He left your mother on the eve of her confinement, in destitution——"

"And that mother—who was she? Name her!" exclaimed Edmund, seeing that Lady Saxondale hesitated. "At least let me know my mother's name!"

"Margaret Somers," answered Lady Saxondale, her soul shrinking within her.

"Somers?" ejaculated Edmund: and for a few moments he reflected in a strange bewildered manner. "I have heard that name before——Margaret Somers!——Why, good God! *Madge* is short for *Margaret!*——That was the name of her who died some time ago, at the house of him who this day has proved to be your son——And by the description of her, she was the same that I saw—— Eternal heavens! I comprehend it all! —— Yes, yes, it is clear as daylight!"—and in a moment the young man became violently excited.

"Edmund, Edmund!" exclaimed Lady Saxondale, almost wild with alarm.

"Oh! my own mother was she in whose way I fell that time!" he continued to cry forth, in allusion to his meeting with Madge Somers in the miserable hut near the Hornsey Wood Tavern, when he was in search of Angela, but when he subsequently fell in with Emily Archer. "Yes—yes—my own mother—that horrible looking wretch——God forgive me for saying so! But it is too dreadful to think that she *was* my mother!"—and the miserable young man sank upon a chair, covering his face with his hands, and weeping bitterly with mingled rage, and shame, and anguish.

Lady Saxondale knew full well to what woman he had alluded: because Madge Somers had told her, the first time she ever called upon her in Park Lane, how she had encountered Edmund, and how she had recognised him to be her own son. Now that her ladyship beheld the young man weeping thus bitterly and plunged into grief, the terror with which he had a few moments back inspired her, turned into a sort of satisfaction—or was at all events relieved; because she flattered herself that she could once more exercise omnipotent sway over him, and prevent him from giving vent either in rage or frenzy to the fearful secret of the murder in the Trent. But all of a sudden Edmund dashed away his tears; and starting up, he bent his eyes upon Lady Saxondale with a renewal of that sinister expression which had before filled her soul with vague, nameless, shapeless terrors; and in a voice that was hoarse and deep, he said, "So that woman was my mother? Oh! better that *you* were my mother than *she*—much as I hate you!"

"Hate me, Edmund?"—and Lady Saxondale again quivered all over, and again felt as if she would never pass through this frightful ordeal.

"Yes—hate you!" repeated the young man, with accents so vehement and looks so sinister that it was impossible to doubt the truth of his assertion. "What reason have I for loving you?—but have I not every cause to detest you? Why did you take me from my mother in mine infancy, to bring me up to believe myself that which I am not?—why did you cradle me in down, only that I might be flung back again upon rags?—why did you make me eat off plate of silver and of gold, only that I might be thrown back on the sorriest crust? But this is not all! Why did you,"—and here he ground his teeth with the pent-up fury of his concentrated rage,—"why did you teach me to become criminal? Why, woman—why did you make me a murderer?"

And the last words came hissing from his lips as if borne on the panting breath of a reptile.

"Edmund, Edmund!" exclaimed her ladyship: "wherefore go on thus? You throw all the blame on me——"

"On you?" he vociferated fiercely. "On whom would you that I should accumulate it? Detestable woman that you are! I hate you—and——"

"And what, Edmund!" almost screamed forth Lady Saxondale, as the most awful terrors filled her soul and the frightfulest visions swept like a desolating hurricane through her imagination,—

the avowal of the murder from his lips—the summoning of the police—Newgate—the Old Bailey—the black cap on the judge's head—the sentence of death—the gibbet—the crowd—the tolling bell—the chaplain's prayer—the halter—and the drop!

"And what? you ask me," he cried, his countenance suddenly expressing a fury that was frenzied and terrible. "This!"—and snatching up from the toilet-table a knife which lay there, he made one tiger-like spring at Lady Saxondale.

"No! no! Spare me!—in mercy spare me!" she shrieked out, flying towards the door.

"Wretch! you shall die!" thundered forth Edmund: and at the same instant he seized upon her.

She turned to battle for her life—while her piercing screams echoed through the house: but her foot tripped—and as she fell, the infuriate Edmund plunged the knife into her bosom. Her rending screams suddenly closed in an awful gasping moan: the young man drew forth the knife from her bosom—and with a wild cry of mingled triumph, rage, and desperation, he plunged it into his own breast. He fell down heavily close where Lady Saxondale herself had fallen; and for a few moments there was a dead silence in that room. But only for a few moments: for the door, which her ladyship had locked, was burst open- and in rushed the Marquis of Eagledean, Hawkshaw, Thompson, and the two lawyers,—Lord Petersfield almost immediately bringing up the rear. Then what a horrifying spectacle met their eyes!

But where was Dr. Ferney? The true and rightful Lord Saxondale had recovered from his swoon—but only to rave in the delirium of fever. He had been borne to a bed-chamber; and the physician was there, in attendance upon him.

And where was Lord Harold Staunton? A few words will suffice to inform the reader. The moment after Lady Saxondale had quitted the State Drawing-room, leading the discomfited and ruined Edmund away, the Marquis of Eagledean had imperiously beckoned Lord Harold to the farther extremity of the apartment; and had there addressed him in the following terms:—

"I have long known that you were steeped to the very lips in profligacies, and that towards myself you have at times harboured the most diabolical intentions. But it is only this day I have learnt the full extent of your iniquity; and that you are—my blood turns cold as I speak it——a murderer!"

Lord Harold staggered back with a countenance ghastly pale, and his eyes fixed in horrified dismay upon his uncle.

"Yes," continued the Marquis; "heaven has decreed that your guilt shall become known—and the waters of the Trent have given up their secrets as evidence against you. Speak not—but hear me! For the sake of the family to which you so unfortunately belong—for the sake of your admirable sister Florina—and for the sake of her husband, that excellent young man, always so noble in nature, now ennobled in name—and who by marriage has become connected with yourself,—for all these reasons the veil of secrecy will be thrown over your enormities. But depart hence! lose no time in leaving the kingdom! fly to some far-off land!—and thence write to let me know where you are, so that just sufficient for a subsistence may henceforth be allowed you. Depart, sir! Not a word! not a syllable!"

Lord Harold Staunton, mentally and morally stricken down to the very dust—though just physically able to drag himself forth from the room—obeyed his uncle's mandate; and in a few moments he quitted Saxondale House—for ever!

But to return to the boudoir. We will not pause to depict the horror, the consternation, and the dismay which seized upon those who burst into that room where the frightful tragedy had taken place. Suffice it to say that prompt assistance was rendered—that Ferney was sent for from Lord Saxondale's chamber—and that when he came, he pronounced life to be extinct in the form of Edmund, but that the vital spark yet remained in that of Lady Saxondale. Profoundly afflicted was the physician—anguish-stricken as well as conscience-smitten—at all that was taking place—at all that *had* taken place; and so overcome with his feelings was he, that it was found necessary for him to be conveyed to his own home, under the charge of the grateful and attached Thompson.

Fresh medical men were sent for—some to devote themselves to the care of Lord Saxondale—others to that of her ladyship. The Marquis of Eagledean sent a message to Juliana, who had locked herself up in her own room, and whose ears the anguished cries of her mother had not reached. She complied with his summons; and he acquainted her with the fearful tragedy that had occurred. She simulated much more feeling than it was in her nature veritably to experience; and the Marquis said to her, "It is for you to watch day and night by your mother's side, so that should she recover—of which the medical men give some hope—she may receive from your lips the assurance that the utmost mercy shall be shown her, and that the veil shall be kept drawn over the darkest passages of her past history. For she has committed deeds, of which I hope and trust—as indeed I believe—that you can have no knowledge; and it is for you to prevent the ears of menials from catching the first words which may fall from her lips when the faculty of speech returns. Do you comprehend me?"

"I do, my lord," answered Juliana; "and I will faithfully obey your instructions."

The Marquis of Eagledean,—who, notwithstanding all the excitement of the scenes, blended with horror too, which characterized this memorable day, preserved his self-possession and his wonted clearness of head,—now set off back again into Kent, to break to Florina the twofold intelligence that her husband was the rightful Lord Saxondale, but that he had been seized with a severe illness. The young lady, half frantic at the latter announcement, insisted upon repairing at once to London, to minister to her beloved husband. This the Marquis had foreseen; and he had a post-chaise-and-four in readiness for the purpose. He despatched by messenger a hasty note to his wife, the Marchioness of Eagledean, to acquaint her with all that had happened, while he himself, with his usual indomitable energy which rendered him insensible of fatigue, accompanied Florina to London. During the journey he broke to her the circumstances which as yet he had left untold: namely, those of the fearful tragedy. Florina was horrified to a degree: but in respect

to her husband the Marquis assured her that she had no serious cause for apprehension, as his illness was merely the result of the overwrought excitement which he had experienced, and that in a few days he would be convalescent.

Pass we over those few days; and let us say that a week had elapsed since the memorable incidents which we have been chronicling. In the meantime there had been an inquest on the body of Edmund; and from the situation in which his own corpse and Lady Saxondale's inanimate form were found in the boudoir,—coupled with the circumstance that her rending shrieks had alarmed the household,—the jury had no difficulty in coming to the decision that the young man had perished by his own hand, after having endeavoured to murder her ladyship. It was of course necessary that in the depositions made at this inquest, the imposture palmed off upon the world by Lady Saxondale in respect to Edmund, and to the prejudice of the rightful heir, should be fully described; and the report of that inquest, through the medium of the newspapers, gave this much of the astounding narrative to the public. The verdict of the jury included an expression of their belief that the deceased young man, considering all the circumstances, could not have been in a sound state of mind—but that he must have been goaded to frenzy when he perpetrated his double crime: and thus this humane view of the case forbade not his interment with Christian ceremonies. The funeral was a plain and simple one —very different indeed from what it would have been, with all appropriate pomp and splendour, if he had died in possession of that title which for twenty-one years he had unconsciously usurped!

The rightful Lord Saxondale continued under the influence of fever for an entire week; and it was not until the expiration of this interval, that he became possessed of his reasoning faculties. Then he recognised the beloved wife of his bosom —the charming and beautiful Florina—who had unwearicdly ministered to him during his illness: but when he began to question her relative to his mother, she was careful not to inform him of the horrible tragedy which had taken place. She merely suffered him to understand that her ladyship was ill and confined to her own chamber: but she gave her husband as much hope as she dared—and perhaps even more, in order to tranquillize him—that this illness of Lady Saxondale's would result in convalescence.

It was not however so. Her ladyship recovered her own consciousness at about the same time as her son regained his in another chamber beneath the same roof. But the wound she had received, though not mortal in itself, was evidently leading to fatal results; and as her last hour drew near, the wretched woman, profoundly conscience-stricken, sought to make all possible atonement for her crimes by a full and complete confession. The Marquis of Eagledean was selected by her as the recipient of these revelations; and one afternoon—about ten days having now elapsed from the date of the tragedy—his lordship found himself seated by the bedside of the dying lady to hear from her lips the narrative of the past. Juliana had been requested to leave the room; and in a feeble voice—in broken language, and with many self-interruptions—Lady Saxondale was enabled to furnish sufficient details for the Marquis to obtain a clear and precise insight into those facts which were previously altogether unknown to him, or which were but dimly outlined to his knowledge.

CHAPTER CLXXIII.

HISTORY OF THE PAST.

The reader will remember how great were the affliction and dismay which seized upon the old Lord Saxondale and his young wife Harriet, as well as upon the entire household at the castle in Lincolnshire, when the intelligence came upon them like a thunderbolt that the infant son and heir was stolen from its nurse's arms. At first her ladyship was really inclined to believe that Ralph Farefield—who she had no doubt was at the bottom of it—purposed to retain the child in some place of concealment, in order to bring his uncle to terms. But this hope wore off in a few hours; and when she was enabled deliberately and seriously to calculate how much Ralph had to gain by the child's death, she could not blind herself to the conviction that her infant son's murder was an extremity but too certain to be adopted by Farefield,—the risk of discovery being worth running on the one hand, considering the immensity of the stake to be played for on the other. The reader is aware that Lady Saxondale possessed a mind beyond the standard strength of her sex's energies; and thus her resolve was speedily taken. She represented to her husband that it would be advisable for her to repair to London, under an assumed name, and secretly institute inquiries into Ralph Farefield's recent movements, or act otherwise as circumstances should suggest. The old lord consented; and her ladyship proceeded to the metropolis, accompanied by her principal tire-woman, Mabel Stewart. This Mabel was about thirty years of age—discreet, prudent, and cool-headed—and one in whom her ladyship fancied she could put the utmost trust.

Taking the name of Smith, Lady Saxondale hired lodgings in a respectable house in Islington. This house was occupied by a widow lady named Ferney, whose son had recently commenced practice as a surgeon. The worthy woman had so impoverished herself in order to afford her son the means of completing his professional education, that when the front parlour was converted into a surgery, and the back one into a receiving-room for patients, the expenses incurred thereby left serious embarassments behind. Of course Mr. Ferney did not at once reap any considerable fruits from his hard studies; and while there were no incomings on the one hand, yet on the other the debts had to be paid—a certain appearance had to be kept up—he and his mother had to live. The house was larger than was necessary for so small a family—it was well furnished—and though with considerable reluctance, they were compelled to put up a bill announcing the drawing-room floor to let. Lady Saxondale needed lodgings, and also needed the aid of a surgeon in carrying out her design. She saw the bill in the window: she was struck

by the coincidence that her two requirements might be afforded beneath one and the same roof; and shrewd as she was, she had no difficulty in reading the circumstances of the people of the house. A struggling medical man—an impoverished mother—and thence the necessity for letting lodgings! She entered the house: she was then in all the bloom of her beauty—and her quick eye showed her in an instant that the pale pensive young surgeon, whom she found seated with his mother, was struck by admiration at her appearance. This, then, was the very place for Lady Saxondale; and, as Mrs. Smith, she became the occupant of the drawing-room floor. In order at once to ingratiate herself with the mistress of the house, she took the floor for a year, paying the entire rent in advance; and this godsend suddenly rescued the Ferneys from the serious embarrassments and apprehensions under which they had been recently labouring.

Lady Saxondale did not let the grass grow under her feet. On leaving Lincolnshire she had not the slightest intention in reality of troubling herself or wasting time about Ralph Farefield's proceedings: her plan was already settled: she was resolved to obtain some poor person's child, and represent it as her own lost infant son. For she argued to herself that if Farefield had not really made away with her little Edmund and should hereafter produce him, the heir would in this case be restored; and Ralph would be too glad to hush up the whole matter without seeking to punish her for a fraud and imposture—because she in her turn could punish him for the theft of her son. But, on the other hand, if he had really murdered that son—which she felt convinced he had—he would not dare proclaim that the supposititious one whom she purposed to palm off, was *not* her own child; for if he did, it would be tantamount to confessing himself the murderer of the true, rightful, and lawful one. Therefore, in either case, the astute Lady Saxondale saw that she would be perfectly safe, and that in the long run Ralph Farefield must inevitably be outwitted. She made a confidante of Mabel; and scarcely were they installed in their lodgings at the Ferneys' house, than the faithful domestic was despatched into the streets of London and to the poorer neighbourhoods, in search of such a child as by age and appearance would answer the required purpose.

Lady Saxondale was a well-read woman; and in the course of her reading she had stumbled upon a book containing many curious narratives relative to the uncertainty of circumstantial evidence, and the fallibility of human judgments when trusting thereto. One history in particular had struck her—a history that is doubtless familiar to many of our readers; namely, that of Martin Guerre. The circumstances of this remarkable story may be shortly summed up. Martin Guerre, a Frenchman, took leave of his wife to embark on a speculative voyage to the Mediterranean. Years elapsed—and he returned not; so that the wife believed herself to be a widow. But at length the inhabitants of her native place were one day startled by the intelligence that Martin Guerre had come back, and that happiness had re-entered his long deserted and desolate home. The neighbours flocked in to congratulate the husband and wife who were thus restored to each other; and the tale of the former was simply that he had been a prisoner for years amongst the Algerines. Time passed on; and again, one day, were the inhabitants of the town startled by the intelligence that another Martin Guerre had just made his appearance. Again, too, were there crowds at the house; and immense was the surprise of the neighbours on finding that the two Martin Guerres were as like each other as if they were twin-brothers. The wife was herself utterly unable to decide between the claims of the two; and an appeal was made to the law-tribunals to decide betwixt them. The tale told by the last-coming Martin Guerre, was that he had been in slavery, where he had fallen in with his litigant rival; and that as their personal appearance presented a remarkable similitude, a great friendship sprang up between them. He went on to say that he freely unbosomed all his family secrets to his friend,—which would account for this latter being enabled to speak to the wife upon circumstances which she would naturally suppose known only to herself and to her husband. Finally, the plaintiff informed the court that his rival had managed to escape before him; and that it was evident he had basely availed himself of these extraordinary circumstances to gain possession of a comfortable home and a handsome wife—both belonging to another. Then came the most remarkable features in this trial. The plaintiff showed certain spots upon his body, which the wife proved to have marked her first husband: but to the wonder of the court the defendant exhibited marks precisely similar! However, it was finally ascertained that the plaintiff—namely, the last-coming Martin Guerre—was the true one, and that the other was a base impostor who had usurped his rights. The latter subsequently confessed that a skilful surgeon's hands had created upon his person the very marks which so closely resembled those on the body of the real Martin Guerre, and which the impostor had during a series of years frequent opportunity of observing when they worked together half naked on the fortifications or in the arsenals of Algiers.

This was the history which had made an impression on the mind of Lady Saxondale, and which flashed to her recollection with strangely suggestive impulses at the moment she was in bitterness bewailing the loss of her son. The hand of a skilful surgeon had created divers marks of a particular nature, and all according to a description given from mere memory, on the back and shoulders of Martin Guerre's rival: and could not another surgical hand create the *one* mark which was needed on the neck of an infant as a proof of its identity with the lost heir of Saxondale? But while Mabel was looking after a child, Lady Saxondale herself was doing her best, not merely to ascertain the degree of intelligence possessed by the pale pensive surgeon, but also to make an impression upon his heart. Though too proud to be beguiled into weakness or frailty by actual sentiment, there was nevertheless nothing to which she would not stoop, if necessary, in order to accomplish those aims that were to outwit Ralph Farefield, and secure to herself a paramount ascendancy in the Saxondale family during the long minority which, considering the old lord's age, an heir might have to pass through after his death. She did her best to ingratiate herself with the widow Ferney -

made her presents, but in the most delicate manner—and, under pretence of adding to her own comforts, purchased a quantity of new things, in the shape of plate, china, and furniture, which in an apparently casual manner she gave the widow to understand she should leave behind when her term was up. Her excuse for being in London was a Chancery suit; and she alleged herself to be the widow of a rich country squire in the north of England. She soon discovered that the surgeon was a man of extraordinary talent—that he was devoted to his profession—that he had made it his study by day and by night—and that he had submitted to almost incredible privations in order to purchase "subjects" (in other parlance, dead bodies) at different times to forward his anatomical practice. The more Lady Saxondale saw of him, the more was she convinced that she could model him to her purpose. He had a laboratory fitted up in the house—and she affected the deepest interest in his experiments. Ferney was delighted: he believed that this interest was genuine: for he was simple-minded, honest, and credulous—a man of wonderful intellect in one sense and of profound ignorance in another—intelligent only in all that related to the objects of his studies, but ignorant as a mere child in the ways of the world and in the workings of the human heart. In less than a week he was completely infatuated with his mother's beautiful lodger. With him, indeed, it was love at first sight; and the passion thus gained ground so rapidly from the circumstance that its object seemed to display such deep interest in the very matters which so profoundly interested himself. Though she was careful at first not to manifest anything bordering on an indelicate forwardness by accompanying him to his laboratory, yet of an evening she would visit the sitting-room occupied by his mother and himself; and while the old lady dozed in her arm-chair, she would turn the conversation upon the enthusiastic surgeon's experiments—asking questions—listening with apparent delight to his explanations—and, with her own ready intelligence, proving that she fully comprehended them. It was a dangerous position for a young man, whose unsophisticated heart had no defences afforded by worldly experience against the wiles of a beautiful woman,—a dangerous position, we say, for him to be placed in; and, unconsciously as it were, he abandoned himself to the growing infatuation.

Within the first week after the arrival in London, chance threw Mabel Stewart in the way of Margaret Somers—a widow with an infant child, the father of which had died ere it was born. The woman—who, as well as the babe, was wrapped in the rags of beggary—asked alms of Mabel Stewart. She contemplated the child attentively; and in so doing, observed that it had a little mole between the neck and the shoulder, almost in the very place where the strawberry appeared upon the lost heir of Saxondale. Affecting to be deeply touched with the woman's tale, she gave her some silver, and bade her call on the following day at the house in Islington, "when perhaps something more would be done for her." Madge Somers did call—and saw Lady Saxondale, who at once felt assured that the child, by its appearance, would answer her purpose. She treated Madge Somers with the utmost kindness—gave her money and clothes—and bade her return in a day or two. She then redoubled her wiles in respect to Ferney—but so artfully, as not to transgress the bounds of modesty nor actual propriety. And *now*, too, she hinted that she should feel pleased in the inspection of his laboratory,—choosing for the opportunity a morning when Mrs. Ferney was absent for a few hours on a visit to some friends. When there, alone with the surgeon, she bent over crucibles and retorts, examined phials and glasses, witnessed experiments, and even practised some,—all the while fanning his passion with the thousand and one arts which a skilful woman of the world knows so well how to carry into effect. In a moment of irresistible infatuation, Ferney cast himself at her feet, vowing that he was her slave. She gave him encouragement—but still in a manner that was calculated only to render him more completely submissive to her will. Availing herself of this opportunity, she turned the discourse gradually away from purely chemical experiments—questioned him on surgical matters—and gradually advanced towards the topic which she was anxious to broach. The unsuspicious Ferney,—while expatiating on the subject,—assured her that he would undertake to create almost any marks resembling natural ones on the person of an infant. But it is not necessary to dwell upon this point of the narrative, nor to extend the details of those means by which Lady Saxondale led Ferney to promise that he would give her a proof of his skill in this particular respect. Madge Somers came again; and Lady Saxondale now played off the artillery of her wiles upon this woman. She invented some story to account for her desire of possessing herself of a child whom she would adopt as her own and bring up in affluence. The bribe offered, was a large one; and Madge Somers had been dragged through the mire of too much misery and suffering, and too many low scenes, to have much good principle left: but still she had the natural love of a mother for her offspring. Nevertheless, she consented to part with it; and leaving the child, she went away with a heavy purse in her pocket.

The widow Ferney was under too many obligations to Mrs. Smith (as Lady Saxondale called herself) to ask impertinent questions, or to exhibit an inconvenient degree of curiosity: while the surgeon was too infatuated with the beautiful lodger, and too callous in respect to proceedings which did not concern himself, to pay any particular attention to this freak of the child being left at the house: for Lady Saxondale was careful not to let it transpire that she had purchased it, and that its mother had left it for good. Ferney was easily induced to practise his skill upon the infant; and Lady Saxondale, as if quite in a casual manner, and also as if catching at the first whimsical thought which entered her head, expressed her wonder whether he could convert the mole into the form of a strawberry. He declared that he could. Then she began to define specifications in respect to the actual size, shape, and appearance which this strawberry-mark was to take—all, she said with laughing cajolery, to put his skill the more severely to the test. He undertook to gratify what he regarded as her caprice—and with all the less hesitation because the operation would be attended with little

pain to the child, and thus his natural humanity would not be shocked. It was done; and Lady Saxondale experienced a glow of inward triumph when she perceived upon the neck of the babe a mark so closely resembling that with which her own son was born, that she felt convinced it would deceive the medical man and the nurse who had seen the lost heir at his birth. And now, too, she could fully comprehend the exact truth of all the details in the history of Martin Guerre.

But it was necessary to remain in London until the mark itself should be completely healed up; and from time to time she wrote cheering and encouraging letters to her husband in Lincolnshire, as described in one of the opening chapters of this narrative. Days grew into weeks; and during this interval Lady Saxondale continued to encourage, without however seeming to do so, the infatuation of the surgeon's passion. But as the widow did not again leave the house for more than half-an-hour at a time, Lady Saxondale was too cautious to enter the laboratory again: she did not choose to do aught to excite the woman's suspicions—and she had induced Ferney to keep the surgical proceeding of the strawberry-mark profoundly secret from his mother. This he readily promised; and so completely was he under the empire of Lady Saxondale, that it was not difficult for her to obtain from him another pledge—namely, that he would never mention the circumstance at all. But in his calmer moments, thoughts—dim, vague, and shapeless suspicions—would steal into the surgeon's mind that he was involved in some mystery which he could not comprehend—that there was a meaning and a purpose in the proceeding of the strawberry-mark—and that it was not a mere whim on the lady's part, nor a mere test of his skill. A secret voice whispered in his soul that he had been unconsciously drawn into a complicity with something which he could not comprehend—that Mrs. Smith was more than she seemed—that rank, and distinction, and a haughtier name, were probably veiled under the common-place appellation of Mrs. Smith. But when he again found himself in her presence, all his scruples and suspicions vanished—he seemed to live only for her—he rejoiced in having been enabled to do aught to serve her, either in the ministering to a mere whim or in the furtherance of some deeper and more important end.

But if Lady Saxondale visited the laboratory no more, she nevertheless regularly passed the evenings in the sitting-room of the widow and her son: or else she had them to tea in her own apartment. While the old lady dozed, or actually slept soundly in her arm chair, the wily Harriet Saxondale practised all her arts to enslave the surgeon so completely that when she should be gone, her image might remain on his soul, to render him faithful to his pledges of secrecy. She exhibited an unwearying interest in his experiments—she learnt his receipts—and amongst them, was one for a certain composition, or elimination, of which he was in reality the discoverer, but which has only within the last few years been known to the world under the name of *Chloroform*. Thus a month from the date of the arrival in London was drawing to a close: the mark was completely healed—and Lady Saxondale was thinking of getting back to Lincolnshire, when a circumstance occurred which for a moment threatened all her plans with utter annihilation. One evening Madge Somers made her appearance at the house; and as Lady Saxondale was taking tea with the Ferneys in their own apartment, the woman made straight for Mabel Stewart's chamber—which she knew. Mabel was at the moment undressing the babe; and she was taken so completely aback—indeed, was so utterly confounded by the suddenness with which Margaret Somers burst in upon her—that she had not time to cover up the mark that had been made on the infant's shoulder. Madge, impelled by motherly affection, sprang forward to snatch up the child and embrace it—when she caught sight of that mark. She was now confounded in her turn; and Lady Saxondale, having been informed by the servant of the house "that Mrs. Somers had come to fetch away the babe which Mrs. Smith had been so kindly keeping for a little while," hurried up to Mabel's chamber. Then ensued an exciting scene. Lady Saxondale endeavoured to persuade Madge Somers that the original mark had strangely and unexpectedly taken this development: the mother knew not what to think—she scarcely believed the tale that was told her, and yet she did not know how to discredit it. Again and again did she study the mark and its exact nature—or rather its appearance, as artificially rendered: and thus it became indelibly impressed on her memory. She vowed that she would have her child again—that she repented of the bargain—that it was an unnatural one, which she could not be compelled to keep—although she admitted having squandered away in dissipation the greater portion of the gold she had received. Lady Saxondale offered larger bribes to induce the woman to adhere to her original compact; and after considerable difficulty, Madge Somers assented to her ladyship's overtures. She went away with five hundred pounds in her pocket; and the next morning Lady Saxondale intimated to the Ferneys that urgent business, connected with the fictitious Chancery suit, compelled her at once to leave for the country.

She did not however choose to say that she never intended to return to her lodgings—though she whispered to the widow, when the son was not by, that if she did not come to retake possession of them in a month, her lease might be considered to be abandoned. Ferney himself was overwhelmed with affliction at the prospect of this abrupt separation: but to him she whispered with a tender smile, that she should return shortly. She begged his acceptance of a splendid diamond-ring: and he, scarcely knowing what memorial to give in return, thought that nothing could be more suitable than the results of some of the delicate and difficult experiments in which she had taken so much interest. With characteristic simplicity, he presented to her a phial of chloroform, together with a small casket filled with elegantly cut little bottles, containing delicious perfumes. Lady Saxondale and Mabel returned into Lincolnshire with the child; and they reached the castle to find the old lord dead, and to learn that Ralph Farefield had just arrived.

The reader is aware of the circumstances under which Lady Saxondale and Ralph Farefield met. The child was displayed, with the mark upon its neck; and Ralph was at once smitten with the

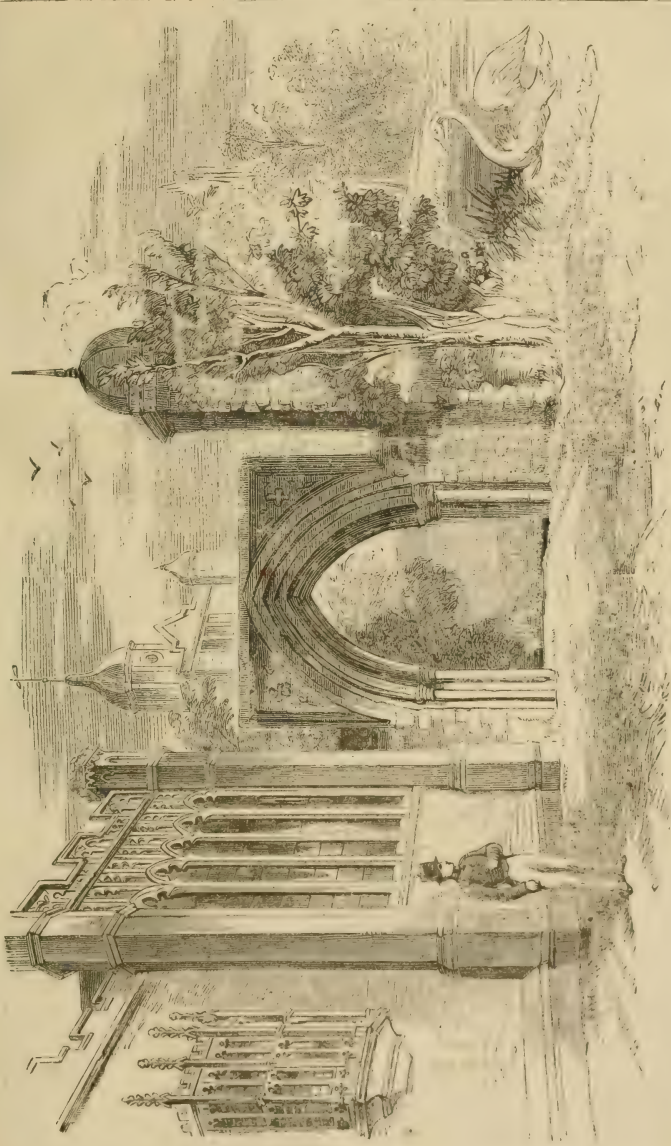
conviction that Chiffin had deceived him in his assertion that the infant heir of Saxondale had been made away with. The reader will recollect that her ladyship led Ralph Farefield into a window-recess—and there, pretending to have some sympathy for him, she made an appointment to meet him at eleven o'clock on the same night in the chapel. The fact was, that notwithstanding all her previous self-reasonings in respect to the certainty of outwitting Farefield, she was afraid of him. She knew him to be a desperate man; and as he was now placed in desperate circumstances, she felt that she was not safe so long as he remained in existence. The supposititious child which had already cost her so much anxiety and trouble, might be cunningly and treacherously made away with; and then adieu to all her grand schemes, her towering hopes, and her lofty projects! She had consummated a tremendous imposture: she now felt that it was necessary to ensure it by an additional crime. Her heart had become hardened—her soul indurated—her conscience blunted, against all compunction and remorse; and it was Ralph Farefield's death which was required to consolidate the position she had been at such pains to build up.

She met him in the chapel: she told him a tale of a treasure being concealed in the vault. He was desperate; and any straw flung out to him, was a hope to save him from drowning in the vortex of despair. Besides, though he himself was vile and so capable of iniquity, he could not possibly think that the beautiful Lady Saxondale was equally wicked. It was with an air of ingenuous frankness that she had told him of twenty thousand pounds being in the vault,—of which he himself was to take five: but in his own mind he resolved to self-appropriate the entire sum. He found, however, that she had taken her precautions against any sudden attack which vindictiveness might urge him to make upon her—and that there was a witness to the entire proceeding: for when bidden to look forth from the chapel-door, he beheld Mabel in the corridor. Then he knew that if he attempted violence to retain the entire treasure, an alarm could be raised; and he was constrained to make up his mind to content himself with the portion she had promised. In obedience to Lady Saxondale's instructions, he began to descend the steps leading into the vault,—she following him. But all in a moment her arm was stretched forth—a kerchief was applied to his nostrils—he inhaled the fatal chloroform, and fell headlong into the water which flooded the place. There he was drowned.

It happened that almost immediately after the departure of Lady Saxondale and Mabel, with the child, from London, business suddenly compelled Mr. Ferney to proceed to Gainsborough—a town he had never visited before; nor indeed was he ever previously in that part of the country at all. Little did he suspect that he was only within a few miles of the Mrs. Smith who had captivated his heart, and who was in reality the now widowed Lady Saxondale: and little, too, on the other hand, did Lady Saxondale herself fancy for a single moment that the surgeon on whom she had practised her wiles, was for the time being so near a neighbour. He became possessed of the body of Ralph Farefield in the way described in an earlier chapter of this narrative: and immediately returning to London, never visited Lincolnshire again until many long years had elapsed, and he had risen to the highest eminence in his profession.

And years and years too must now be passed over in this chapter of explanations,—the leap taking us from the middle of 1825 to the middle of 1844. The next incident we have to note was the meeting of Madge Somers with her son, after a separation of nineteen years. During that interval she had passed through the depravities of an abandoned life,—so that when she was first introduced to the reader in our opening chapters, she had become the companion and the accomplice of such villains as Chiffin the Cannibal and the rest of the gang whose head-quarters were at the public-house in Agar Town. It will be recollected how Edmund fell in with her at the cottage near the Seven Sisters' Road, when he was in search of Angela Vivaldi. She laid a plot with Chiffin for his assassination while he slept: but just as she was about to plunge her knife into his breast, she caught sight of the mark upon his neck. She knew him to be her son: for that mark was indelibly impressed upon her memory. His features, too—though he was now a young man—were precisely what she could fancy the infantile face would have grown into. There was no doubt it was her own son whom she had meant to immolate! We need not recapitulate the means she adopted to get him safe out of the house, and save him from an otherwise certain death at the hand of Chiffin. When he was gone, she recollected that Chiffin had exhibited a strange surprise when she had mentioned to him that the intended victim was Lord Saxondale. She had just discovered that he who bore the name of Lord Saxondale was none other than her own offspring; and she therefore became anxious to learn why that name should have in any way interested the Cannibal. By means of brandy-and-water she drew the ruffian out—and learnt from him how he had been engaged long years back to steal and to make away with the rightful heir of Saxondale, but how the child had been left amongst gipsies. The very next night Madge Somers proceeded to Saxondale House in Park Lane,—a night on which its noble mistress gave a grand banquet. Lady Saxondale knew her in a moment—though time and dissipation, depravity and iniquity, had traced upon her countenance those strong lines which were not there when long years back she had surrendered up her child. Madge bluntly told her ladyship that she now comprehended everything; and she received a considerable sum of money as a bribe to keep the secret. With a portion of that money she fulfilled a promise made to Chiffin, of indemnifying him for the loss sustained by the failure of the previous night's enterprise.

The reader does not require to be reminded that Dr. Ferney cherished the passion which he had conceived for Lady Saxondale when she lodged at his mother's house. Nineteen years passed away since that date: the widow Ferney went down to the grave—and the surgeon became a physician—removed from the moderate-sized house and simply respectable neighbourhood at Islington, to the large mansion in the fashionable quarter of Hanover Square. Throughout those nineteen years had Ferney retained the image of the beauteous



EDENBRIDGE PARK.

woman impressed upon his heart: and though his infatuation had become attempered down into an endeared, an affectionate, and an undying reminiscence, still was that image cherished by him. For all this long interval nothing occurred to strengthen the dim suspicion which he entertained at the time that the Mrs. Smith of the lodging was other than she seemed to be: but when he thought of the child and the mark he had made upon its shoulder, he did his best to banish the circumstance from his memory, in vague and mysterious dread lest he had indeed been rendered the accomplice of something more than a mere passing whim on the lady's part. So went by the nineteen years; and at the end of this long period he was destined to behold the object of his love again. She called upon him in terror relative to the bottle of chloroform which Chiffin the Cannibal had taken away with him on the night of the burglary at Saxondale House: for we should observe that ever since the practical use Lady Saxondale had made of the chloroform presented to her by Ferney, and which had cleared her path of Ralph Farefield, she had taken care not to be without so valuable a fluid. Being possessed of the secret how to eliminate it, she was enabled to profit by the instructions received from Ferney at the time she was a lodger in the house at Islington. But, as we were saying, they met after an interval of nineteen years; and Lady Saxondale still passed as Mrs. Smith, though the physician suspected that she was something more. When he took her into his laboratory and showed her the phial of powerful poison which was his most recent experiment, the sudden thought flashed to her mind that it would be convenient for herself to possess it. She accordingly self-appropriated that phial, in the confusion of the crash of bottles which she purposely caused with the fringe of her shawl. From the laboratory she passed into the museum; and there, to her awful wonderment and dismay, did she behold the form of Ralph Farefield, looking as he looked the last time she ever saw him—nineteen years back!

We must now observe that for some time past, Mabel Stewart's disposition had considerably changed: her discretion and prudence gave way to fretfulness and ill-temper; she became irritable and dissatisfied—and her disagreeable conduct provoked ill feelings on the part of the other domestics, as well as of Edmund and the young ladies, which only had the effect of irritating her all the more. She was cognizant of two damnatory circumstances in respect to her mistress: namely, the secret relative to Edmund, and the murder of Ralph Farefield. It was Mabel's growing perverseness which had flashed to the mind of Lady Saxondale when she self-appropriated the bottle of poison at the physician's house. On the very next day following her mysterious visit to Conduit Street, Mabel exhibited herself in a light more outrageous than ever. It will be recollected that she was not merely abusive, but that she made use of threats; and Lady Saxondale was even then more than half resolved to make away with her. But still she hesitated: for notwithstanding her soul was so deeply stained with crime, she could not readily bring herself to the perpetration of another. In the evening of the same day on which that scene took place with Mabel, Madge Somers called again; and this time it was to insist that measures should be taken to stop the prosecution of the Cannibal and Tony Wilkins on account of the burglary. Her ladyship was compelled to submit, and likewise to present Madge with a farther supply of money—all of which was lost at the gaming-table in that female pandemonium which the vile woman frequented.

The visits of Madge Somers, the conduct of Mabel, the behaviour of Edmund, and divers other circumstances which were related at the time, were now goading Lady Saxondale to despair; and she felt that no possible strength of mind would enable her to bear up against so much. Therefore, when some days afterwards another scene with Mabel took place, and the woman insisted that all the domestics of the household should be formally instructed to show her the completest deference,—Lady Saxondale's mind was made up with reference to one whose existence upon earth was fraught with so much terror and danger in her eyes. That same night Mabel was poisoned with a drop of Dr. Ferney's fatal elimination.

The next incident which has to be noticed, is the visit paid by Juliana at night to Madge Somers. In a chance conversation with Edmund, she learnt, as will be remembered, a description of this woman, and it precisely tallied with that which she had already received from the lips of Frank Paton. She was at that time at daggers drawn with her mother, and was therefore most anxious to ascertain wherefore such an ill-looking person could visit Lady Saxondale, and what power she had acquired over her. Guided by the information received from Edmund, she set out—visited Madge at her cottage—and by pretending to come on a message from Lady Saxondale, gradually and skilfully wormed out of her enough to make her comprehend the tremendous secret connected with Edmund These circumstances were followed by the visit of Lady Saxondale and Juliana to the castle in Lincolnshire. There, as it will be remembered, Lord Harold Staunton boldly propounded his plans to Lady Saxondale, and gave her to understand that he meant to make her his wife. She promised compliance,—though secretly cherishing a very different intention. Lord Harold was to go to London for the purpose of bribing Emily Archer into silence with regard to the tale of the masquerade and the duel: but no sooner had he taken his departure, when Lady Saxondale wrote a letter to Chiffin, desiring him to hasten down to the castle. She had resolved to make away with Lord Harold: but inasmuch as Mabel had died so recently and so suddenly beneath her roof in London, she feared that *another* sudden death so closely following on the former, and beneath the roof of another of her mansions, would lead to suspicion. She therefore discarded the idea of poison—and wrote, as just described, to summon Chiffin to her aid.

Lord Harold returned into Lincolnshire, and was closely followed by Emily Archer herself. From the interview which took place between her ladyship and the ballet-dancer, the former perceived that she was completely in the power of the latter, and that circumstances had thus raised up in her path another obstacle which must be cleared away. Having already made up her mind to a fresh deed of turpitude, in respect to Harold

it required no great struggle with her conscience, and no severe battling against compunctious scruples, to transfer her murderous intent from the young nobleman to the ballet-dancer. With that devilish cunning, too, which was characteristic of her, she calculated that she might render Harold her instrument in her new design, and postpone for farther consideration whether she should marry him or not. Indeed, she almost began to think it would be better to make him her husband, as he had already become her paramour. She was not too old to be devoid of dread as to the consequences of the intrigue; and at all events she would secure, in the half infatuated, half selfish young nobleman, a permanent co-operator and accomplice in her numerous machinations. She broke her wishes to him in respect to Emily Archer—and by various representations, arts, and wiles, she bent him to her purpose. The plan was all arranged; and in order to place Harold in circumstances which might utterly avert suspicion after the enactment of the contemplated tragedy, the little scene was got up in respect to the apparent accident with Mr. Hawkshaw's thorough-bred. It will be remembered that the appointment with Emily Archer and her maid was arranged for between nine and ten o'clock in the evening of that same day,—the spot being midway between the castle and Gainsborough. Lady Saxondale retired from the drawing-room for about a quarter of an hour, on pretence of writing letters in the library: but in reality she repaired to the chamber occupied by Staunton, and where it was supposed he was stretched helplessly on his back in consequence of the accident. But, according to preconcerted arrangement, he was ready dressed for his expedition. He muffled himself in his cloak, so as to hide his countenance in case of meeting any one—and also in case the attack upon the intended victims should fail and he might have to fly to escape detection on their part. He was moreover provided with his pistols, each being double-barrelled, and every barrel loaded with a bullet. Then, aided by Lady Saxondale, he passed forth from the castle by means of a window in one of the tapestry-chambers, and the tree which grew against that casement.

A little later in the evening, when supper was served up, Florina suddenly intimated her intention of ascending to her brother's chamber, to inquire if he would partake of some refreshment. Lady Saxondale, knowing he could not as yet have possibly returned, was for an instant smitten with dismay at the threatened proceeding: but instantaneously recovering herself, she affably offered to accompany Florina. They proceeded to the chamber of the supposed invalid,—her ladyship, taking good care to be the first to reach the door; and affecting to listen on the threshold, she made a sign for Florina to remain where she was. Then she advanced on tip-toe to the couch, wherein she well knew she should find nobody; and hastening back to the young lady with every appearance of noiseless caution, assured her that her brother was sleeping. Thus did the wily woman extricate herself from an embarrassment which a few minutes before had appeared serious indeed. When the household retired to rest, she proceeded again to Harold's chamber—and this time found him there. The tragedy had been accomplished: one pistol had sufficed to do the deed,—each of the two barrels of that one weapon having sent forth a bullet with fatal effect. The masquerade-dress had been thrown into the river: but in his confusion and horror Harold had likewise flung in the pistol which had accomplished the double murder. The other weapon, which there had been no necessity to use, was restored to his pistol-case. From Harold's chamber Lady Saxondale proceeded to the chapel, which she was accustomed to visit on particular nights, in order to see if Chiffin had attended to her letter. She found him there; and from his lips heard the confirmation of Harold's tale of the tragedy. But she did not require the villain's services *now*, for the purpose which had originally induced her to write to him: instead of making away with Lord Harold, she had decided upon espousing him. She however engaged the Cannibal on that occasion, by the offer of an immense bribe, to rid her path of Mr. Gunthorpe and William Deveril—little suspecting at the instant that the former was a great nobleman and the latter was her own son. Early on the following morning Lady Saxondale visited Harold's chamber again: for a thought had struck her, filling her mind with uneasiness. The clothes he had worn on the previous evening, were sure to be wet and might be stained with blood: these evidences of the crime must therefore be caused to disappear. It was as she suspected: those garments were in the condition she had foreseen. A bundle was therefore made of them; and from the window of the tapestry-chamber did she consign them to the depths of the Trent.

Emily Archer was no more: *that* obstacle was removed from her path:—but scarcely was this crime consummated, when another circumstance for the moment threatened Lady Saxondale with destruction. This was the sudden appearance of Dr. Ferney at the Castle,—Dr. Ferney, who now discovered who was the Mrs. Smith that he had so long known by no other name, but whom he at length found to be the brilliant Lady Saxondale! He came to inform her that the body of Mabel Stewart had been taken to his house, and that he had ascertained she had died by poison—that very poison the elimination of which was one of the results of his own experiments. It is however only necessary to glance at this circumstance for the purpose of reminding the reader how Lady Saxondale succeeded in overcoming the scruples of the physician, and rendering him pliant to her interests and ductile to her purposes once more.

Shortly after these occurrences, Madge Somers found her way into Lincolnshire. Her funds were exhausted—she required more money: and whence could she so readily or so easily obtain it as from the hands of Lady Saxondale? Having arrived at Gainsborough, she was on her way to the Castle, when she accidentally slipped into the river, and was gallantly rescued by William Deveril from a watery grave. They were both hospitably treated at the peasants' cottage. Madge, on recovering—and previous to taking her departure—was desirous to express her gratitude to the young gentleman whose magnanimous conduct had made a deep impression upon the woman's mind. But while she was seated with him in the chamber where he lay, he fainted through exhaustion: and then, to her infinite surprise, Madge beheld be-

tween his neck and his shoulder, a mark precisely similar to that which she knew to be on the person of her own son—the young man then passing as Lord Saxondale. It will be remembered that from the lips of Chiffin she had heard the entire story of how the rightful heir of Saxondale had been stolen in his infancy, and had been left amongst gipsies: she now therefore knew that in her deliverer from a watery grave she beheld that heir! She scrutinized his features—and she saw a sufficient resemblance between his countenance and that of Lady Saxondale, to corroborate her belief. When he awoke to consciousness, the facts she gleaned from him confirmed the idea—if any such confirmation were needed. The reader will remember with what solemn earnestness she adjured him to say whether he had listened favourably to Lady Saxondale's overtures of love; and likewise how strangely the ejaculation "Ah!" had come forth from her lips, when in the course of conversation he declared that he had never been within the walls of Saxondale Castle in all his life.

It appears to be a special decree of Providence that no nature shall ever become so completely brutalized but that it has at least one single glimmering of a better feeling left,—that no heart shall be rendered so utterly obdurate as not to have one single chord that may sooner or later vibrate with a kind sympathy. All this was illustrated in the case of Madge Somers. She owed her life to the young man who lay stretched before her eyes; and she was touched on his behalf. She saw that a tremendous wrong had been perpetrated, and that he was debarred of his just rights. Her conscience smote her for having surrendered up her own son to usurp the place which this young man ought to occupy; and there was even a sensation of solemn awe in her soul as the thought was forced upon her that heaven itself had sent this young man to deliver her from death, in order that by the awakening of her sympathies and her remorse, its own inscrutable purposes might be worked out in the bringing of him to the attainment and enjoyment of his own. Madge was a singular being; and her course was decisively taken. She at once saw that, without corroborative evidence, the bare assertion of William Deveril's claims to the estates and peerage of Saxondale, would be but of little avail—and that everything depended on the discovery of the man Thompson, who could tell more about him. For Deveril had been adopted as the child of those to whom he was evidently in no way related: he had regarded them as his parents: nothing had occurred to make him suspect the contrary; and as they were dead and gone, the evidence of one who might tell a different tale and show that he was *not* their son, was indispensably needful. Madge Somers was sanguine as well as persevering. She was resolved to search for the man Thompson, and to set out upon the enterprise with as much courage and spirit as ever did a warrior of other times embark upon a crusade to a far-off land.

This narrative of explanations is now drawing towards a close; and there remains only one incident to which attention need be specially directed. This was the consignment of Edmund as an alleged lunatic to the care of Dr. Ferney. It will be remembered that when Edmund was removed thither from the asylum of Dr. Burdett in the middle of the night, Dr. Ferney was left in ignorance until the very last moment of the name of the patient he was about to receive. This name was not mentioned to him until Dr. Burdett's keeper was hurriedly taking his leave; and the next moment the physician remained alone in the parlour with the young man who had been announced to him as Lord Saxondale. The mere mention of the name struck upon Ferney's heart as a remorse; and as he contemplated the bearer of that name, and saw that he possessed not the faintest resemblance to Lady Saxondale, strange suspicions began agitating in the physician's mind. Now for the first time did those thoughts of the past, which were dim, vague, and shapeless in respect to the mystery of the strawberry-mark—begin to develop themselves into consistency; and he shuddered within himself as he thought it possible that he could at length read the tremendous truth. Hence that anguished murmuring to himself of "My God! my God! if it should be so—and I have been instrumental——But no: it cannot be——But if not *that*, what *else*?"

Tortured by the horrified feelings thus excited within him, Ferney waited in feverish impatience until he thought Edmund was asleep in the room to which he was consigned; and thither did he stealthily repair. Edmund *did* sleep; and the physician, unfastening his night-garments, examined his shoulder. Yes—his suspicion was confirmed: *there* was the mark which his own hand had made! On the following day he called in a half-distracted state of mind upon Lady Saxondale: but again did the wily woman succeed in over-ruling all his compunctions and conquering all his scruples.

The reader knows the rest—not forgetting the murder of Adelaide, Edmund's wife;—and it is therefore useless to have recourse to any additional recapitulation. It will however be perceived that *all* the details which have been given in this chapter, could not have emanated entirely from the lips of Lady Saxondale when she lay upon her death-bed, and when her confession was made to the Marquis of Eagledean. But those facts which were deficient in her own narrative, were either already within his lordship's knowledge, or the range of his conjecture—or else were subsequently revealed by Ferney: so that no incident was wanting to afford in due time a complete reading of all the mysteries of the past.

Lady Saxondale died in the evening of the same day on which her confession was made; and let us hope that the repentance which she expressed, was sincere. It was not until several days afterwards that it was deemed prudent to break the intelligence of her decease to her son, Lord Saxondale: but though for a few hours it plunged him into a relapse, yet this was succeeded by a development of energy arising from a sense of the last duty which he had to perform towards his parent. Forgotten was everything in the shape of injury that he had sustained at her hands: he thought of her only with mingled love and grief: he followed her remains to the tomb—and the tears which he shed over her coffin, were as full of anguish as if it were the best, the kindest, and the most virtuous of mothers whose loss was thus deplored.

CHAPTER CLXXIV.

A NIGHT IN FRANCE.

It was about ten days after the tragic incidents at Saxondale House in Park Lane, and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, that an ill-looking man, very indifferently dressed, entered a small wine-shop in the little town of Vairan, situate midway between Lyons and Grenoble. He passed into a room devoted for the accommodation of wayfarers and customers; and in wretchedly broken French, called for some brandy and something to eat. The French waiter looked at the fellow with a very evil eye, as if he thought that he was scarcely capable of paying even the moderate expense to be incurred for his refreshments—or at all events that his appearance was of so suspicious a nature the establishment could very well do without such a patron. The man,—whose countenance was of a most hang-dog description, and the fierceness of which was enhanced by a dark beard of three or four days' growth,—scowled terribly upon the waiter; and tossing down a couple of francs, growlingly muttered a frightful imprecation in English,—adding in his broken French, "Take your money, and give me the change."

The waiter, though still with some degree of reluctance, quitted the room to fetch what the man had ordered—and presently returned therewith. The fellow was in the midst of his repast,—moistening his bread and meat with a frequent draught of brandy-and-water,—when the door of the room opened; and another English wayfarer entered, whose appearance was scarcely more commendable than that of the other. He was dressed like a decayed groom or coachman—but had altogether so savage an expression of countenance that it was difficult to suppose he could have recently been in any gentleman's service in either of those capacities. The man who had first entered, raised his eyes from the meal before him; and when his looks encountered those of the newcomer, they both started with the suddenness of mutual recognition, and grim smiles of satisfaction and astonishment appeared upon their countenances.

"What, Chiffin, old feller?" ejaculated the one who had last entered: and he thrust forth his hand.

"Yes—it's me, Mat," responded the Cannibal, laying down his food and grasping the Cadger's outstretched hand. "It's no other than the famous Mr. Chiffin, Esquire, that you see before you."

"And uncommon sorry I am to see Mr. Chiffin in no better plight," answered Mat, surveying the Cannibal's seedy apparel and dirty, unkempt, unshaven appearance.

"Well, I can't say," growled the latter, "that I can pay you any better compliment. Things have gone precious hard with me for some time past——"

"And with me too," rejoined Mat the Cadger; "particularly since I come into this devil of a country where I can't speak a sentence of the lingo."

But here the conversation was temporarily cut short by the entrance of the waiter, bearing some refreshment which Mat the Cadger had ordered as he passed the bar,—his knowledge of the French tongue being confined to the half-dozen words expressing the articles which he most generally needed—such as bread, meat, brandy, cheese, tobacco, &c. The waiter, whose suspicions had been excited by the appearance of Chiffin, had certainly but little cause to be moved in his favour, when he perceived that he had found a companion—perhaps a friend, and perhaps an accomplice—in the almost equally ill-looking rascal who had last entered. It naturally occurred to the man that the meeting of these two—both being Englishmen, and both being of an evil aspect—was not so accidental as it seemed and as in truth it was: but the thought struck him that they had met at the wine-shop to concoct some villany. Therefore, upon leaving the room, he mentioned his suspicions to the master of the establishment; and this individual thought it prudent to send an intimation to the gendarmes in the town, to the effect that two very ill-looking foreigners were at the moment beneath his roof.

Meanwhile Chiffin and Mat the Cadger were discussing their refreshments and continuing their discourse.

"Why, it must be a matter of pretty near eighteen months—at all events fifteen or sixteen," said the Cannibal, "since you and me separated on that night when we were so preciously sold in endeavouring to carry off Madge Somers. You jumped out of the window——"

"The best thing I could do," replied Mat. "But what did they do with you? for you never turned up afterwards."

"What did they do?" growled Chiffin: "why, they didn't behave unhandsome, I must say, considering all circumstances. They packed me off to France; and when I was safe landed at Calais, I had thirty pounds put into my hand. Now you must know that Lord Eagledean had sent to America some time before that, to order a good sum of money to be paid to me if I presented myself in person to receive it. So I was resolved to go over to New York and take possession of the blunt. Well, I got as far as Havre-de-Grace—a place where the packets sail from for America. I took my berth, as a steerage passenger; and as the ship wasn't going to sail for three or four days, I thought I would amuse myself by looking about the town."

"And so you got into some scrape," interjected Mat; "I'll be bound!"

"By Satan, you are just right there!" growled the Cannibal, with a fearfully gloomy look: "and the worse luck for me too. I got blazing drunk at a wine-shop—kicked up a diabolic row—smashed three or four Frenchmen almost to bits—was took before the magistrate—and got sent to quod for six months. There was a pretty start!—or I should say it wasn't any start at all: for the ship sailed without me, as a matter of course—and my passage-money was forfeited."

"Well, that was a misfortune," observed the Cadger, as he emptied his glass.

"So I come out of gaol with only about twenty francs in my pocket," resumed the Cannibal; "and what was I to do? I knowed it was no use to write to Lord Eagledean and ask for more money:

he had quite enough reason to be sick and tired of me. But I did write to Lady Saxondale and Lord Harold Staunton—and got no answer. I suppose they thought fit to cut their old acquaintance when he was in trouble."

"Very likely," said Mat. "But what have you been doing ever since you came out of gaol?"

"Leading a life that would be hard to give an exact account of," answered the Cannibal;—"wandering about like a lost dog—aye, and like a half-starved one too, sometimes—doing a bit of prigging here and highway robbery there—having a precious lot of very narrow escapes—and in short, dragging on such an existence that I'm uncommon tired of it. Ah! what a fool I have been! The money I have had! the use I might have made of my noble patrons!"—and in desperation the Cannibal dashed his clenched fist forcibly upon the table.

"Well, I can't tell of better things," observed the Cadger. "England got too hot to hold me; and so about a month ago I came over to France. I had a trifle of money with me; and so as yet I hav'n't been forced to do anything queer in this country. I meant to get on into Italy, where there's a gentleman I had some claim upon a good many years ago; and as he keeps a lot of horses and dogs, I have been thinking he might take me into his service—particularly as he has been too long abroad to know anything to my discredit. But my funds fell short at Lyons; and so I am forced to make up my mind to do the best I can to get on to Florence—which is where the gentleman is. I have walked every bit of the way from Calais to this place—and have taken a month to do it."

"And now," asked the Cannibal, "how much money have you got in your pocket?"

"Not more than enough to pay for what I have had here, and my bed. To-morrow morning I shall go upon the tramp without a *sou* left."

"And that's exactly my case," rejoined the Cannibal. "What's to be done? For I suppose that now chance has flung us together, we sha'n't separate in a hurry."

"Not if there's any good to be got by keeping with each other," rejoined Mat the Cadger.

"Why, if I had only a pal to work with, I shouldn't be as I am," proceeded Chiffin. "There's plenty of travellers on all the roads: but it isn't an easy thing for a fellow single-handed to stop a carriage or chaise. It's even dangerous to tackle a man when he's alone in a gig: for he may have pistols about him—and I have got none. Now, Mat—what do you say? Shall you and me work together?"

"It seems as if it was all arranged beforehand," answered the Cadger: "or else why did destiny fling us together? Yes, Chiffin—I will work with you."

Here the landlord entered the room; and pretending to look about for something, surveyed his two customers in a manner which not only showed them how little welcome they were — but implied as plainly as looks could do, that if they had finished their meals he would rather have their room than their company. They did not however immediately choose to take the hint: and so he retired.

"Now, old feller," said Mat the Cadger, "I suppose you know what *that* means? We can't have beds here: they don't like the looks of us—and it's not the first time, since I have been in France, that my appearance has told against me."

"Well, it isn't a very handsome one," observed the Cannibal: "neither is mine, for that matter. But as we can't stay here, let's toddle; and as we have agreed to work together, let's make a beginning to-night. Perhaps we shall get something worth having; and to-morrow shall be able to enjoy ourselves with a good booze for old acquaintance' sake. What say you?"

"With all my heart," replied Mat the Cadger. "I am a trifle tired or so, after a walk of twenty-five miles to-day from half-way to Lyons: but if there's anything to be got, I am not the chap to give way to fatigue."

"Then come," said the Cannibal: and aware that he and his friend were regarded with suspicion by the landlord, he concealed his club underneath his coat, which he buttoned over his chest.

The two villains, having settled their score, issued forth from the wine-shop; and quitting the town of Vairan, they continued on the road to Genoble. It was now about ten o'clock: the moon was shining bright—it was a delicious evening—and all objects were plainly visible. They went on, conversing together—but stopping every now and then to listen whether they could hear the sounds of any approaching equipage: for they were resolved, if circumstances should appear favourable, to commence their partnership operations without delay. An hour passed; and they encountered only a few poor wayfarers, who did not present an appearance which rendered it worth while to run any risk by attacking them. Chiffin had his club in readiness for action: Mat the Cadger had likewise a good stout stick; and these weapons were formidable enough in the hands of such desperate characters.

Presently they heard the sounds of an equipage approaching from behind. They stopped and listened; and as it drew nearer, their experienced ears made them aware that it was a vehicle drawn by two horses.

"The very thing!" muttered Chiffin: "there will be only one postilion. You make a dash at him—and leave me to deal with anybody else that there may be."

"All right!" responded Mat. "There's nothing like settling our duties beforehand:"—then as the equipage came in sight, he added quickly, "Yes—it's a pair!"

"And no one on the box!" immediately observed Chiffin. "A light *calèche* too—not more than two travellers inside, I'll be bound. Let's walk slowly on, and seem to be talking, as if we didn't mean mischief."

The chaise came up: the animals were jogging along at the usually miserable pace at which post horses are accustomed to proceed on the French roads; and the postilion, with his great heavy boots, was sitting comfortably enough in his saddle, totally unsuspicious of impending mischief. All in an instant Mat the Cadger sprang at the horse's heads—clutched the reins with one hand—and with the club which he held in the other, struck down the postilion. But the Frenchman was not stunned; and instantaneously springing to

his feet, he resolutely and valiantly grappled with the Cadger.

Meanwhile Chiffin had flown to the door of the *caleche*: but just as he tore it open, the traveller inside—for it contained only one gentleman—fired a pistol; and the bullet whisked by the Cannibal's ear. Fearing that there might be a second pistol in readiness, Chiffin threw himself upon the traveller—tore him out of the chaise with the force and fury of a wild beast—and hurled him to the ground. At the same moment the horses, frightened by the disturbance, dashed away; and the hind-wheel of the chaise went completely over the traveller's neck,—breaking it, so that death was instantaneous.

The horses dashed on; and as the chaise passed away, the shadow which it had thrown upon the ground, disappeared as suddenly from the spot: so that the clear moonlight now streamed full upon the face of the dead traveller. An ejaculation of astonishment burst from the lips of Chiffin: for in that traveller he at once recognised Lord Harold Staunton!

At the same moment the galloping sounds of horses' hoofs were heard approaching from the direction of Vairan; and Chiffin flew to the assistance of his comrade, Mat the Cadger, whom the French postilion had flung upon the ground, and on whose breast his knee was placed. The Cannibal's club dealt the unfortunate post-boy such a tremendous blow as to dash out his brains; and he fell dead upon the spot. The next instant the two ruffians had leapt the hedge which skirted the road, and were flying across the adjacent field. But the comers on horseback,—who, indeed, consisted of a posse of gendarmes,—were not to be thus baulked. They gallantly leapt the hedge, and dashed across the meadow in pursuit of the fugitives.

"We are done for, Mat!" exclaimed Chiffin. "It's the guillotine — or else a resistance unto death!"

"Resistance!" echoed the desperate Cadger: and like two wild beasts at bay, they turned to face the gendarmes.

These,—who were half-a-dozen in number,—called upon them to surrender: but the only answer was a furious attack made by the villains; for they were goaded to mingled frenzy and despair, and they literally sought death. One officer was struck to the ground by a blow of Chiffin's club—another had his arm broken by the Cadger's cudgel: the others closed in around them. But still the two desperate men fought with a valour worthy of a better cause,—until Mat was stricken dead with a blow of a cutlass—and a bullet through the brain ended the iniquitous career of Chiffin the Cannibal.

Lord Harold Staunton's passport told who he was: the report of his death was published in the newspapers, and through this channel shortly came to the knowledge of the Marquis of Eagledean,—who, though he deplored the fate of a young man cut off ere he had time to repent of his manifold sins, was nevertheless relieved from the apprehension of being succeeded in his title and estates by one whose soul was stained with the crime of murder.

CONCLUSION.

No difficulty was experienced in making good the claims of our hero to the title and estates of Saxondale. The subject of those claims was duly investigated by a Commitee of Privileges appointed by the House of Lords,—the principal deponents being the Marquis of Eagledean, Dr. Ferney, and Mr. Thompson. The Marquis, while giving his evidence, merely recited so much of the late Lady Saxondale's confession as had immediate reference to the question under investigation: her deeper and darker crimes he kept entirely out of view. Dr. Ferney—spirit-broken and crushed, not merely by the recollections of the past, but also by the recent horrors which had occurred at Saxondale House—presented but the ghost of his former self; so that his appearance, and the tale of love's infatuation which he told, won for him a considerable amount of sympathy. As there was not any ground to believe him culpable of a conscious and wilful complicity in the initiation of the imposture twenty-one years back,—but as it was only too evident that his passion had rendered him the weak tool of an artful and designing woman,—moreover, as it was through his instrumentality that this imposture was suddenly blazoned forth to the whole world,—it entered not into the mind of any one to proclaim him worthy of punishment. When the judgment of the Committee was pronounced, and Lord Saxondale was invited to take his seat amongst the Peers of England—Dr. Ferney, having done all that was required of him, resolved to withdraw completely into private life. He gave up his profession—he quitted his house in Conduit Street—and he retired to the picturesque dwelling at Rhavadergwy in Wales, which the Marquis and Marchioness of Eagledean placed at his disposal. Thither he was accompanied by the faithful and attached Thompson,—on whom Lord Saxondale settled an annuity, so as to relieve him from a complete state of dependence on the physician. No museum, and no laboratory were established at Rhavadergwy: Dr. Ferney had conceived a sudden and unconquerable disgust for all those circumstances and pursuits which could not fail to remind him vividly of the past; and it was in the recreations of literature that the remainder of his days were spent. He lived but three or four years after the occurrences at Saxondale House: his health gradually declined—his constitution, never strong, gave way—and he expired in the arms of the attached Thompson.

The full extent of Lady Saxondale's crimes, as well as those of Lord Harold Staunton, was religiously concealed from our hero and the beauteous Florina. Indeed Lord and Lady Saxondale are now completely happy: their grief for the loss, the one of a mother, the other of a brother, gradually became attempered down to a pious resignation—until it was absorbed in the elements of felicity with which they were so profusely surrounded. They have four children—two sons and two daughters,—constituting the chief source of their happiness, and in whom are reflected the manly beauty of their father and the feminine graces of their mother.

The Marquis of Eagledean is now in his seventieth year, but as hale and as hearty as when we

first introduced him to the reader. There being no heir to his title, the entail of his estates ceases, and he is enabled to bequeath them to whomsoever he chooses. Lord and Lady Saxondale, being already immensely rich, require nothing at the old nobleman's hands: it is the same with Lord and Lady Everton—the same too with the Count and Countess of Christoval; and therefore the bulk of the Marquis's property is willed to Mr. and Mrs. Paton, a munificent jointure being reserved for the Marchioness. All those personages whose names have just been mentioned, are as happy as the reader can wish them to be;—and, beyond those petty evils which are incidental to even the most prosperous human condition, no cloud threatens to cast its shadow upon the tenour of their existence.

Juliana—fortunately for herself—became subjected to influences alike corrective and beneficent, when the terrific drama developed its mingled phases of wonderment and horror at Saxondale House. The vigils which she kept by her mother's bedside until almost the last moment, impressed upon her mind the terrors of that death-bed to which guilt had brought her parent; and she was led to deplore her own frailties. Then, on the rightful Lord Saxondale's recovery from his illness, she found herself clasped in the arms of a brother,—a brother who was prepared to receive her as his sister, and to treat her with all the kindness which was characteristic of his nature. The period of mourning for the deceased Lady Saxondale was passed by Juliana at the mansion in Park Lane, with her brother and her sister-in-law; and as it drew towards an end, she received a note from Mr. Forester, respectfully and affectionately worded, soliciting an interview. This she declined, in the belief that he was desirous of drawing her into a renewal of that connexion which had been cut short by the tragic circumstances at Saxondale House. A few months elapsed, during which Juliana heard no more of Mr. Forester; but at the expiration of that interval, she received a second note, assuring her that the impression her image had left upon his mind, was stronger than he had at first fancied—and he offered her his hand. This she accepted; and her brother, Lord Saxondale, settled upon her an annuity of fifteen hundred a year; so that it proved by no means an ineligible match, in a worldly point of view, for Mr. Forester. But inasmuch as Juliana's character had been too much damaged for her to hope speedily to regain her footing in English society, she and her husband have since their marriage resided abroad—chiefly in Italy; and we are happy in being enabled to add that the lady's conduct has been perfectly and scrupulously correct.

It may easily be supposed that the Marchioness of Villebelle—the beautiful Constance—was perfectly astounded when she learnt that the deceased Edmund was not her brother, but that he whom she had known as William Deveril, stood in this light towards her: and mingled with that wonderment was a profound affliction at the tragic end of her mother. Her husband continued to fill eminent diplomatic situations throughout the reign of Louis-Philippe, and likewise while the Republic lasted: but when Louis Napoleon usurped the Imperial Crown of France, the high-minded Marquis refused to serve under the new dynasty. Fortunately for him, a very distant relative—whom he had not seen and scarcely known for years—died about the same time of that usurpation; and the Marquis found himself the heir to a large fortune. From motives of delicacy,—being unwilling to meet his former wife, if wife she could be called—the Countess of Christoval,—he has visited England rarely; indeed, only for a few weeks at a time, to enable Constance to see her brother and sister-in-law; and now the Marquis and Marchioness are settled down on the handsome estate in the South of France, which formed a portion of his recently acquired inheritance.

We must not forget to observe that Mary-Anne—Constance's faithful lady's-maid—formed an excellent matrimonial alliance. She was one morning combing out her long luxuriant hair before a glass placed on a toilet-table near the window of her chamber at the mansion of the French Embassy in Madrid,—when she unconsciously became the object of admiration on the part of a middle-aged English gentleman who was lodging at an hotel on the opposite side of the street. The admirer was a bachelor, with a moderate fortune; and he longed for the bliss of matrimony. He soon contrived to form an acquaintance with Mary-Anne—he wooed and won her—and the marriage has been a perfectly happy one, notwithstanding the disparity of some sixteen or seventeen years in their respective ages.

Lord Petersfield paid the debt of nature a few months after the incidents at Saxondale House. He had to be examined as a witness in a law-suit which came under the cognizance of the Court of Queen's Bench; and it is supposed that the exceeding home-thrust questions which the learned counsel put, and which compelled him for once in his life to give point-blank answers, appeared to his mind so utterly destructive of that diplomatic reserve which had become habitual, and so completely subversive of his solemn gravity, as altogether to upset him; and unable to bear up against the shock, he took to his bed—which he never left alive.

Squire Hawkshaw continues unmarried, and is likely to remain so. He is an occasional visitor at the houses of those friends with whom circumstances rendered him so intimate; and he is always a welcome guest.

A few years back, a certain Mark Bellamy was convicted of forgery, before a criminal tribunal at Vienna, and was sentenced to work in the Austrian quicksilver-mines for the remainder of his life. About the same time, Mrs. Martin—another creature of the late Lord Everton, the uncle and persecutor of the present one—died in wretchedness in an English workhouse.

We have now no more to relate. Our task, so far as the present narrative is concerned, has reached its termination. But ere laying down our pen, we invite the attention of our myriads of readers to a Fourth and Concluding Series of "THE MYSTERIES OF THE COURT OF LONDON."

END OF THE THIRD SERIES.

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